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MARTIN'S DEVILS

THE STRANGE STORY OF FINLAND'S MOST FAMOUS POLTERGEIST CASE

WALTZING WITH SPIRITS

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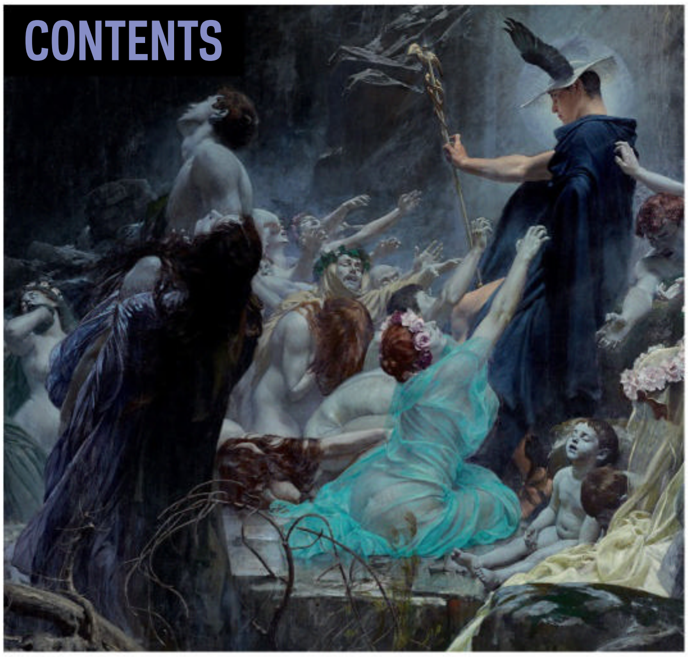
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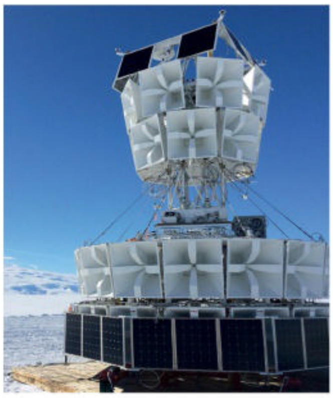
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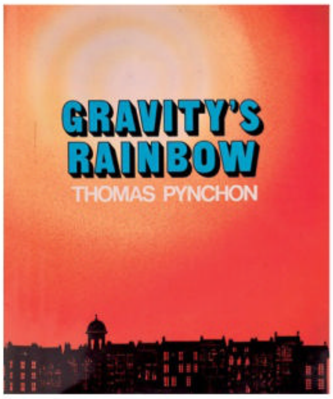

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THE HAUNTED SCREENS

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ForteanTimes

EDITOR
DAVID SUTTON
drsutton@forteantimes.com

FOUNDING EDITORS
BOB RICKARD (bobrickard@mail.com)
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

NEWS EDITOR
IAN SIMMONS (simmons@forteantimes.com)

ART DIRECTOR
ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteantimes.com)

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR
DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
ABIGAIL MASON

RESIDENT CARTOONIST
HUNT EMERSON

PRODUCTION MANAGER
LEE BOYMAN (lee.boyman@metropolis.co.uk)

ADVERTISING
JAMES KELLOCK (james.kellock@metropolis.co.uk)

FT ON THE INTERNET
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David Saunders TEL: +44 (0) 208 752 8195
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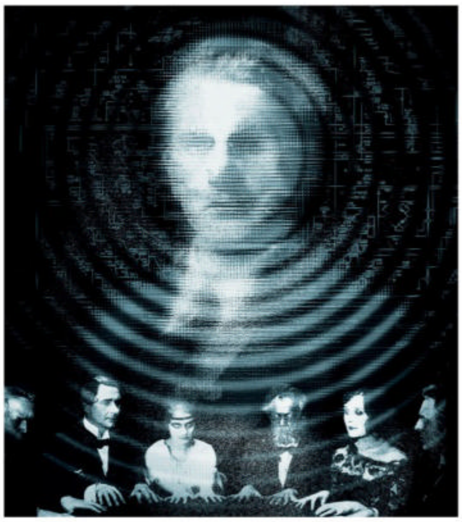
EDITORIAL

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

OLD AND NEW



This issue marks two anniversaries, one involving the birth of a game-changing modern technology, the other a resurgence of what might be seen as primitive superstition, but they are nonetheless linked by the notion that the seemingly rational everyday world is not necessarily the only one we inhabit; and that it is, anyway, subject to sudden irruptions of weirdness.

One hundred years ago, in January 1926, the Scottish inventor John Logie Baird gave the first public demonstration of his latest discovery: a method of transmitting “radio with pictures” that would become known as “television”. As Brian Robb points out in our cover feature, this revolutionary technological breakthrough must have looked a lot like magic: and, indeed, the quest for such “seeing at a distance” emerged from a hinterland of Spiritualism and séances as much as it did from scientific enquiry and Wellsian science fiction. Baird’s invention was arguably as much a fulfilment of the 19th century’s occult obsessions as it was the dawn of the 20th century’s increasingly visual culture.

Emilia Ukonnen marks another, earlier anniversary – a January 1885 poltergeist outbreak in rural Finland that became known as “Martin’s Devils”. The reason it remains one of the country’s best documented poltergeist cases represents another meeting of old and new worlds: the accusations of witchcraft that could still be made in remote communities as late as the 1880s were all set down in court records; the charges of sorcery (as well as of illegal alcohol sales) were also dismissed in the courthouse… leaving us with a classic poltergeist case and an enduring mystery.

INTO 2026

We’re at that strange time of year when here at Fortean Towers we’re putting the January issue to bed while – back in the real world – Christmas is yet to come. So as we prepare to enter 2026, we’d like to thank all those who have helped keep *FT* on track throughout 2025: our fabulously talented contributors, cartoonists and columnists, our dedicated news-hounds, clipsters and correspondents, and, of course, our readers – we hope you will join us in looking forward to another year of high strangeness – here in the pages of FT, at least.

ERRATA

FT459:16-19, 29: Philip Eagle noted a mistake on this issue’s front cover, which refers to ghostly monks in St Albans, “while Alan Murdie’s column (pp.16-19) deals entirely with hauntings in Bury St Edmunds”. Philip also shared “a spot of *Doctor Who* pedantry” prompted by Jenny Randles’s UFO Files column, in which Jenny “alludes to ‘bedroom invader’ experiences reported by the actress Debbie, or Deborah, Watling, and states that she played the Second Doctor’s companion ‘Vicky’. Watling’s character Victoria Waterfield was a proper young lady from Victorian England who was almost always referred to by her full first name. There may be some confusion with Vicki, a far more adventurous companion of the First Doctor from the far future, played by Maureen O’Brien (in my opinion one of the series’ most underrated characters).”

FT459:43: In Alan Murdie’s article ‘Beyond Cottingley’, the film still on the last page was captioned incorrectly. The image is not from the 1997 film *Photographing Fairies*, but in fact shows actress Elizabeth Earl as Francis in the same year’s *Fairytale: A True Story*. Thanks to Heather Rowe for pointing this out.

COVER ILLUSTRATION
ETIENNE GILFILLAN

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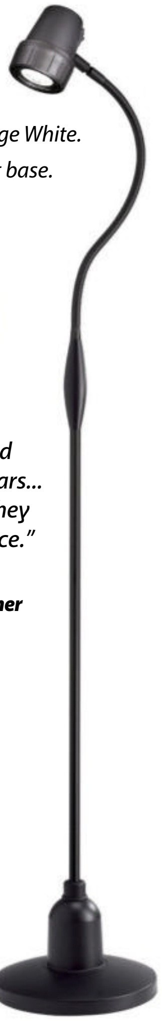

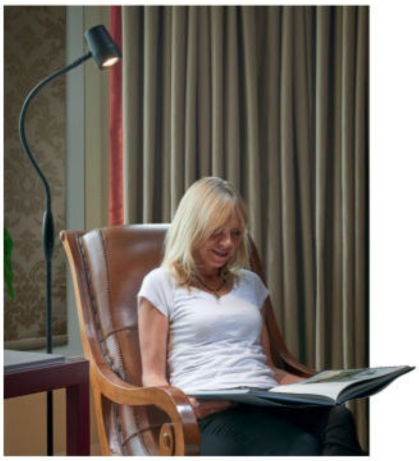

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

JAPAN'S BEAR WARS

2025 saw an unprecedented number of bear attacks – now the military are being called in

When the legendarily large, wily and dangerous "Ninja Bear" was finally killed in 2023 (see **FT426:7, 448:22**), the Japanese could have been forgiven for thinking that the worst was over. However, this was not to be; 2025 has been an unprecedented year for bear/human clashes, with the situation becoming so bad in the Akita Prefecture that the Japan Self-Defence Forces (SDF) have been deployed to tackle the problem.

In late November, a 69-year-old security guard was pounced on by a bear as he used a public toilet in Gunma prefecture, north of Tokyo, after spotting the animal nonchalantly peering in the window. He fell backwards and managed to kick the bear repeatedly until it fled, leaving him with only minor injuries. He was one of the lucky ones. Thirteen people have been killed by bears in Japan since the start of April this year alone; the highest death toll since Japan began keeping records of bear attacks in 2006. In the same period there were also 197 non-fatal attacks, many inflicting serious injuries. These include a man mauled by a bear while cleaning an outdoor bath at a traditional spa, a 78-year-old woman attacked in Gojome town – along with the 50-year-old woman who came to help when she heard screams – and a jogging New Zealander. An elderly woman in Akita city was killed after encountering a bear while working on a farm in late October, and earlier in the year a 79-year-old woman was killed while foraging for mushrooms locally. Another forager, a man in his 70s, was beheaded, although a 93-year-old farmer, thought to have been the victim of a bear attack, turned out to have been murdered by his son.

くま危険
BEWARE OF BEARS
Caution Bear in the Area!!!
注意熊出没！！！
STOP! KEEP OUT

2025年 9月 September
MON
TUE
THU
FRI
SAT

LEFT: Bear warning signs have been posted in parks and on popular nature trails. **BELOW LEFT**: A sign recording brown bear sightings at Shiretoko Five Lakes, Hokkaido Prefecture, where a hiker was killed in a bear attack in August 2025.

KAZUNO EMPSON / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

A 79-year-old woman was killed while foraging for mushrooms

Incidents in the year 2025-2026 are likely to exceed those in 2024-2025, when 219 people were attacked. And none of these figures include incidents where bears caused damage and mayhem without hurting anyone. One rampaged through a supermarket, stopping to rummage in the shop's fish and sushi displays before trampling a pile of avocados in the fruit aisle; another was found loitering outside a nursery school, trapping children and teachers inside.

There are two species of Japanese bear: the Asiatic black bear, and the Ezo or Ussuri brown bear. While the black bear weighs up to 130kg (287lb), brown bears are up to three times bigger, and can easily weigh 400kg (882lb). Most of the attacks have been by black bears. Shota Mochizuki, associate professor at Fukushima University, explains: "This is largely because black bears are widely distributed across Honshu and Shikoku, where many people live, while brown bears inhabit only Hokkaido, resulting in fewer opportunities for encounters with humans," adding, "However, attacks by brown bears are far more severe. Brown bears are significantly larger and stronger, and their attacks much more often lead to serious injuries or fatalities."

While there was hope that incidents would die out as the bears went into autumn hibernation, the animals have remained active near populated areas in greater numbers than usual. Most of the incidents have occurred in Akita, in the north, but there have been serious problems in Iwate and Fukushima in Japan's north-east too, where locals have reported a sixfold increase in bear sightings this year. Some residents have started carrying bear bells, used to raise the alarm and scare the animals off, even in semi-urban areas, and in these areas many outdoor events have been called off for fear of bear incursions. According to the Institute for Asian Black Bear Research and Preservation, young bears venturing into urban areas to search for food often do not return to the

ENIGMA
UFO Sightings
& Alerts

KILLER APP FOR UFOs?
A searchable database of recent sightings
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THE SILPHIUM ENIGMA
On the track of an elusive ancient herb
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CRIMINALLY STUPID
Another round-up of hapless hoodlums
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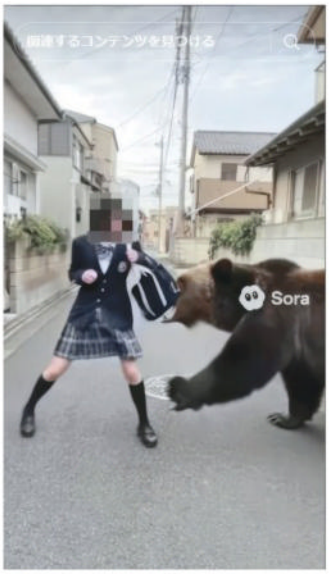
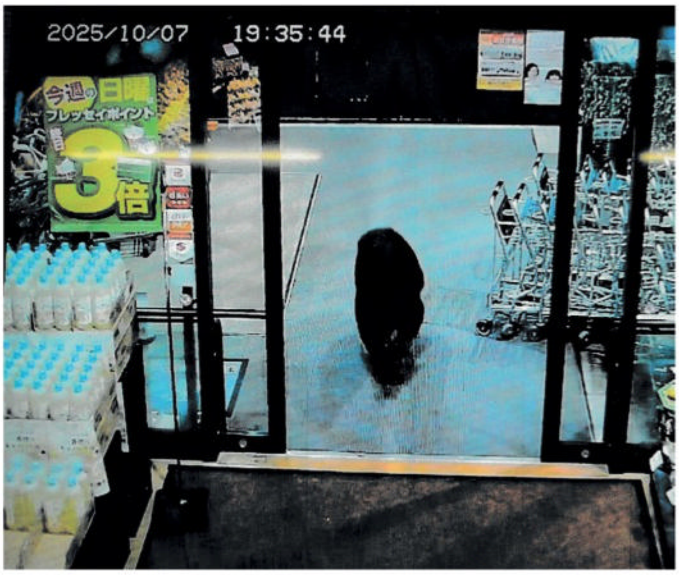




ABOVE LEFT: One of the AI-faked videos – this one of a schoolgirl fighting off a bear – that have helped fuel fears about bear attacks. **ABOVE RIGHT**: A bear caught on CCTV entering a supermarket in Numata, Gunma Prefecture, on 7 October 2025.

mountains to hibernate; instead, they remain in the towns and hibernate on shrine grounds or in parks after the New Year. "They could appear near populated areas as late as early January next year, making it essential to remain vigilant," said Kazuhiko Maita, head of the institute. "Even if they begin to hibernate, noise and other disturbances could wake them up."

Japan Self-Defence Force troops have now been deployed to Kazuno, one of the towns most seriously afflicted by bears. The soldiers are armed with bear sprays, sticks, shields, goggles, bulletproof jackets and net launchers, the defence ministry said. "As bears continue to enter populated areas in many regions and injuries from bear attacks increase daily, we absolutely cannot afford to put off bear countermeasures." The local bear officer Yasuhiro Kitakata added: "Even if just temporary, the SDF's help is a big relief. I used to think bears would always run away when they heard noise, but now they actually come toward you. They're truly frightening animals." Selected local hunters have also been given large-bore bear ammunition and are authorised to shoot dangerous animals. In response to the bear onslaught, Tokio Marine and Nichido Fire Insurance has introduced coverage for businesses affected by bear intrusions, aimed primarily at hotel and leisure operators, and Hong Kong-based Blue Cross (Asia Pacific) Insurance has added extra bear-attack protection to its travel policies. Not everyone is proving helpful, however. Panic about bear rampages has been fanned by the circulation of very convincing AI-faked bear attack videos; one claims to show several bears destroying panels at a solar plant, another involves a bear appearing to make off with a pet dog in its jaws, and one of the most popular shows a schoolgirl successfully fighting a bear, which would be suicidal in real life.

It is believed that a combination of factors is at the root of the bear wars; human habitat has continually encroached on bear territory, although in recent years rural depopulation has complicated matters, blurring boundaries between inhabited and wild areas, so that bears come into contact with humans far more frequently than they once did. This results in bears becoming acclimatised to the presence of humans, making them less likely to flee when encountering someone, and also more assertive when they do, plus they swiftly discover that human habitations are a good source of food. Then, in recent years, conservation efforts have benefitted the bears, so their population has grown rapidly in Japan. This year, though, has seen poor crops of acorns and beechnuts, which bears eat in large quantities. The result has been significant numbers of bears with little fear of humans coming into towns and villages to look for a meal and running into unwary members of the public, who, to a hungry bear, are just as edible as abandoned takeaways. *scmp.com. 20 Aug; edition.cnn.com, 20 Oct; straitstimes.com, 2 Nov; reuters.com, 5 Nov; theguardian.com, 6+28 Nov; kidsnews.com.au, 9 Nov; aljazeera.com, 14 Nov; independent.co.uk, 29 Nov 2025.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

FLASHER BANNED FROM ALLEYWAYS EXCEPT ON BIN DAY

Kent Online, 8 Nov 2025.

World's only flightless parrot doing okay against 'crusty bum' disease

Popular Science, 21 Oct 2025.

GHOST OF MARY SHELLEY 'SEEN' ENTERING BOURNEMOUTH WETHERSPOONS

Daily Echo, 18 Nov 2025.

Footballer who 'died', was jailed in Singapore and once stole a penguin joins Scottish club as sporting director

Independent, 27 Oct 2025.

SIDELINES

BALLOONACY

While trying to land in Russell Park, Bedford, a hot air balloon lost momentum and started to come down over nearby residential streets. However, locals managed to grab guide ropes dangling from the basket and manœuvre it away from houses, over telephone wires and past parked cars, steering it safely to rest in the middle of narrow Bower Street without causing any damage to either property or the balloon itself. *D.Mail, 25 Aug 2025.*

STRANGE SWARM

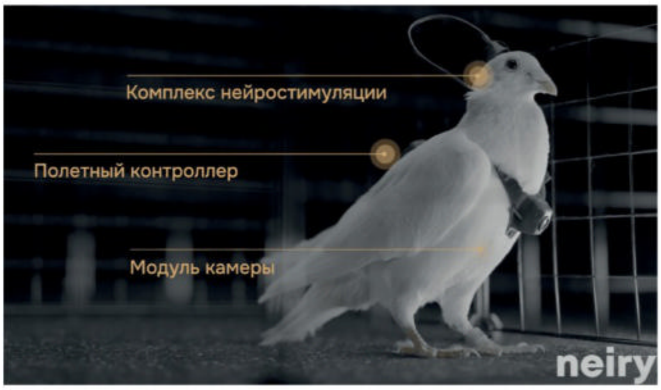
On the way to her dentist in Iford, Sussex, on 13 May, Pauline Cherry was startled by something passing over her car. "It wasn't birds or bees," she said, "It made a noise like stones being thrown at the car, and looking up I saw white/cream coloured objects about the size of a small hardboiled egg cut lengthways going over… It was a large swarm and could have been insects, but what sort of insects are that size?" Cherry subsequently found that a friend had also seen the strange swarm, but from a distance, while walking in nearby Denton, saying they were relieved it hadn't come in their direction. *S.Express, 23, 30 May 2025.*

TOUGH BABY

In Bettiah, a town in Bihar, India, relatives of a one-year-old boy named only as Govinda, panicked when they saw a cobra had coiled itself around his hands, but it turned out he had the situation totally under control. "When we saw the snake in the child's hand, everyone rushed towards him, but in the meantime, he already bit the snake, killing it on the spot," his grandmother said. After biting the reptile, Govinda passed out; he had ingested a small amount of venom when biting the cobra but only suffered mild effects and swiftly recovered in hospital. *independent.co.uk, 27 Jul 2025.*

MARTIN ROSS

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY...



LEFT: In Russia, pigeons are being transformed into "biodromes". **BELOW**: Twelve-year-old Jackson Oswalt – the youngest person to achieve nucear fusion.

PIGEON HACKING

Moscow neurotechnology start-up Neiry, which has close links to the Putin regime, has revealed a flock of "pigeon biodrones". Codenamed PJN-1, these are living pigeons with neural chips implanted in their brains, connecting to miniature solar-powered backpacks that house electronics, a GPS tracker and radio receivers, enabling humans to remotely control their behaviour. Neiry say their innovations make it possible for operators to steer entire flocks of pigeons across the sky with precision via remote signals. They claim their birds can fly 310 miles (499km) a day, and can be operated successfully as soon as their implants are installed as "no training is required". The birds, however, are easily identified as having been modified because their electronics package and its connection to the brain implants are clearly visible. Company founder Alexander Panov is excited by the potential of these birds, explaining that they could be equipped with cameras and other instruments to carry out spy missions. "Right now, the solution works on pigeons, but any bird can be used as the carrier," he says. "For transporting heavier payloads we plan to use ravens." He is also thinking about weaponising seagulls and albatrosses for marine missions. *the-sun.com, 27 Nov 2025.*

ROBOBEES

Vertical farming, an intensive form of agriculture that grows plants hydroponically on vertical racks in warehouses using artificial light, is increasingly seen as the future of food production. It can grow a lot of plants close to urban areas with a drastically reduced carbon footprint, using a fraction of the water consumed by conventional agriculture and so is ideal for feeding the world's increasingly vast cities. However, vertical farms can't grow any plant that is insect pollinated, as domestic honeybees cannot navigate indoors in artificial light and the alternative, pollination by hand, is expensive and time-consuming. Now, robotics researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have come up with a tiny robot bee that can do the job instead. Weighing less than a gramme, these "micro-aerial vehicles (MAVs)" could take the place of bees in vertical farms as their design has significantly improved flight precision and agility compared to previous of types of insect-scale MAVs. They have better wing flexibility, enabling faster manœuvres, increased endurance and a longer lifespan. "The amount of flight we demonstrated in this paper is probably longer than the entire amount of flight our field has been able to accumulate with these robotic insects," said lead researcher Kevin Chen. "With the improved lifespan and precision of this robot, we are getting closer to some very exciting applications, like assisted pollination." *[UPI], 4 Feb 2025.*

NUCLEAR FAMILY

While "Radioactive Boy Scout" David Hahn attracted the attention of the police and the US Environmental Protection Agency with his 1994 attempt to build a fast breeder nuclear reactor in his garden shed (which eventually needed to be disposed of as highly radioactive nuclear waste), Jackson Oswalt, 13, from Memphis, Tennessee, got a rather easier ride when he built a successful nuclear fusion reactor in his garage; he merely got a polite visit from the FBI to check for radiation leaks. However, as Oswalt had built his reactor with the full knowledge of his parents, who had sought advice about appropriate safety measures, there were none, so they left him in peace to continue with his project. After coming across a TED talk by Taylor

GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS

Camera 01
DOI

ABOVE LEFT: A factory worker flees from a rampaging robot. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Russian robot AIdol takes a tumble.

Wilson, who achieved controlled nuclear fusion in 2008 at the age of 14, Oswalt resolved to do the same because he "wanted to show that even though I was young, I could do serious things".

Having read up on the science behind creating nuclear fusion, he set about building his reactor using materials bought on eBay, funded by his parents, who spent between $8,000 and $10,000 on the project. He explained: "I rebuilt the vacuum chamber, got a turbomolecular pump from eBay, sourced some Deuterium for fuel (somewhat legally), and rebuilt the inner grid from Tantalum." His work paid off and, he says, "After a handful of stressful tests just days before my 13th birthday, I successfully achieved fusion and detected these neutrons as proof!" This resulted in him being recognised by Guinness as the youngest person to achieve nuclear fusion. *timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20 Mar 2025.*

RAGE WITH THE MACHINE

In a video that went viral on social media last May, two factory workers can be seen conversing while near a humanoid robot held upright by a small crane. As they do so, the robot appears to start moving of its own accord, repeatedly raising its arms, then bringing them down with increasing speed and violence while walking towards the men in an apparent attempt to break away from the crane restraining it. The workers can be seen flinching away from the rampaging machine as it smashes into their desk, knocking a monitor to the floor and scattering other items, before one of them successfully disables the robot by disconnecting it at the crane. It is unclear exactly when this happened, or where, but it appears to be somewhere in Asia, possibly South Korea.

> *He was helping dismantle a robot when the device came to life*

Meanwhile in the US, former Tesla robotics technician Peter Hinterdobler, 50, is suing the carmaker for $51 million (£38.5m) after he was allegedly knocked unconscious by a rogue robot in the company's factory in Fremont, California, in 2023. Hinterdobler says he was helping an engineer dismantle a robot when the device came to life, despite being switched off and disconnected, with the machine's arm, linked to an 8,000lb (3,628kg) counterbalance, being "suddenly and without warning released with great force", knocking him flying and rendering him unconscious. As a result, he is suing both Tesla and FANUC America, the Japanese firm that built the robot, for damages. Neither company has publicly commented on the claim.

In Hangzhou, China, though, the robots were supposed to be lashing out. As part of the China Media Group World Robot Competition there were both fighting demonstrations and kick-boxing matches between small robots developed by Unitree Robotics, claimed to be the world's first combat sports event between humanoid robots. The competition also featured athletics, football and dance competitions. One robot ended up dropping out of the 1,500-metres because its head flew off during the race, much to the dismay of Wang Ziyi, a 19-year-old student from Beijing Union University who was part of the team that entered the robot. "Keeping [the head] balanced while in movement is the biggest challenge for us," he said. *the-sun.com, 2 May; dailymail.co.uk, 26 Sept 2025; theguardian.com, 15 Aug 2025.*

ROBOFAIL

Russian tech seems to be lagging some way behind that of the Chinese. At the debut of the first Russian autonomous AI-powered humanoid robot, AIdol, at a major tech conference, the machine was supposed to make a triumphal entry to the *Rocky* theme tune. However, moments after emerging from the wings, it fatally face-planted and could not be righted, so technicians rushed on stage to cover it with a blanket, which quickly became tangled in the robot's still thrashing limbs. Even when such presentations do go to plan, there is frequently suspicion that the naturalistic behaviour of a robot is a result of it being a human in a suit, so XPeng Motors, a Chinese new energy vehicle brand, ended up distributing a video of their CEO cutting into the leg of their impressively naturalistic robot prototype to show it had a metal skeleton and that there was no one inside. However, it did not preclude the robot being operated via a motion-capture rig that transmits a human's movement to a connected machine, enabling it to move in a human manner, but without being a suit containing a person. *BBC News, 12 Nov; odditycentral.com, 13 Nov 2025.*

SIDELINES

TOILET TRESPASSER

A 75-year-old homeowner in Carrigrohane, County Cork, Ireland, was disconcerted to hear a blast of loud music from somewhere in his house. Investigating, he found a complete stranger, Trevor Morey, 38, in his bathroom, sitting on the closed toilet lid listening to a religious ceremony on his phone. Asked why he was there, Morey replied, "God sent me," then resumed listening to the ceremony until the Gardai, called by the homeowner, arrived and arrested him. *irishexaminer.com, 29 Jul 2025.*

SNIFFS AND BUTTS

Police in Burbank, California, arrested Calese Crowder, 38, in a Walmart parking lot after reports of a man acting suspiciously in the women's department. CCTV showed Crowder crouched behind a woman and engaging "in lewd behaviour by inappropriately sniffing her buttocks". Crowder was on parole for a string of similar offences, including intrusively sniffing a woman in a Barnes & Noble book shop, which had earned him the nickname of "The Glendale Butt Sniffer" and a place on the sex offenders register. *ktla.com, 25 Jul 2025.*

RAZZIER

In the US, the Food and Drug Administration issued a warning and recalled several batches of the Celsius Astro Vibe Blue Razz energy drink after cans were found to be full of vodka instead of the expected caffeine-infused fizz. This came about when a supplier accidentally shipped Celsius cans to High Noon, a vodka seltzer company, who duly filled them with alcohol and sent them out in their Beach Variety Packs. *bbc.co.uk/news, 30 Jul 2025.*

STIFF PENALTY

Bradford Blackmon, a Mississippi State Senator, has put a bill to the state legislature outlining a "Contraception Begins at Erection Act". It proposes that "discharge of genetic material without the intent to fertilize an embryo" should be illegal, with fines of up to $10,000 for offenders. Blackmon came up with the bill to highlight the fact that reproductive legislation is extremely unbalanced and predominantly targets women. *D.Mirror, 25 Jan 2025.*

SIDELINES...

WHITEFACE

Horror fans across the US have been fascinated by a series of VHS tapes with "Whiteface" crudely written on taped labels that have been found at locations across the country, including a Hollywood video store, a bar in Nashville, a thrift store in Orlando, and an art gallery in Virginia. All the tapes, which are suspected of being part of a viral marketing campaign, contain over three hours of disjointed amateurishly filmed scenes featuring a man with a white face wandering about Los Angeles, harassing people and entering unlocked houses. The video also appears on YouTube, but as yet there has been no word of anything it might be promoting. *metro.co.uk, 3 Jul 2025.*

DOUBLE ACE

Golfers Steve Wilmshurst, 58, and Liam Nairn, 70, beat odds of more than 17 million to one when they sank consecutive holes in one at Studley Wood Golf Club in Oxfordshire. "We all watched Liam's ball go onto the green, then up in the hole," Wilmshurst explained. "About 30 seconds later I took my shot, and it disappeared." Then, he added, "when Liam went to get his ball out of the hole he said: 'Oh yours is in here as well.' It's a wonderful thing. It doesn't happen very often." *BBC News, 11 Sept 2024.*

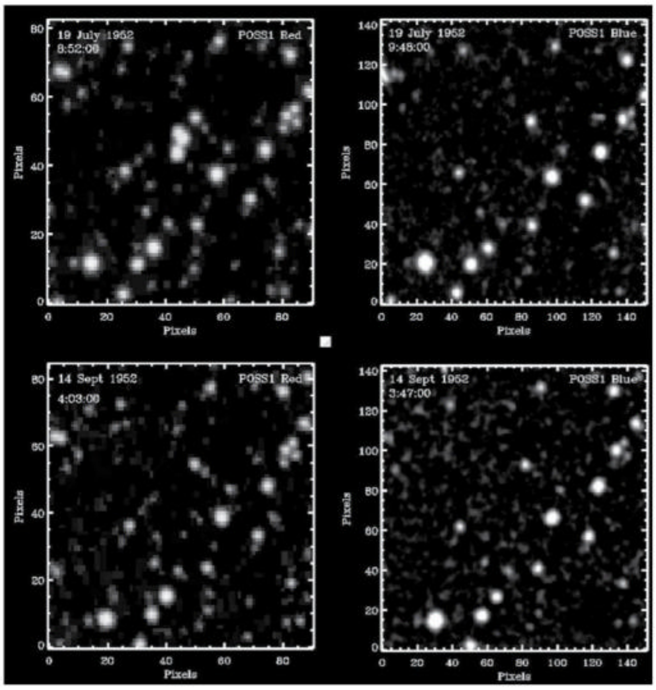
SPIDER CHAIRS

Arachnophile James O'Haloran is upset that the idea spiders have a "general creepiness" has taken hold, and has recommended exercises that might help alleviate fear of the creatures, including staring at things that resemble spider legs, such as long chair legs and wheel spokes. He also applauds virtual and augmented reality applications that are "bringing about the means to treat arachnophobia without ever having to sit face-to-face with a spider". *D.Mail, 22 Aug 2025.*

MARTIN ROSS

UFOS-A-GO-GO

Link between UFOs and nuclear test sites gets a boost, plus an incident at Area 51



LEFT: Four exposures of a triple transient identified in July 1952.

NUCLEAR TRANSIENTS

The Vanishing & Appearing Sources during a Century of Observations (VASCO) project searches for fleeting astronomical events appearing in archival photographic images taken by the Palomar Observatory in California in the early 1950s (**FT442:24-25**). These are particularly useful for this purpose as they were taken before any satellites or space debris from Earth were in orbit. Researchers are looking for star-like objects that appear in one photo, but are gone by the time the same region of sky is photographed again. Initially, the primary aim of the project was to seek out failed supernovas in the far distant Universe, but increasingly VASCO has been concentrating on transients appearing closer to Earth. These could be small fragments of asteroids, or maybe just damage to the photographic plates, or, more intriguingly, UFOs of some kind; and because this work is being done by reputable scientific institutions, their results are being taken seriously in academic circles.

One of VASCO's earliest findings was to link a significant appearance of transients to the legendary Washington UFO flap of 1952 (**FT265:32-37, 425:29**) and now they have done further work that connects transients to both nuclear weapons testing and UFO sightings, which has been published in the prestigious peer-reviewed journal *Nature: Scientific Reports.*

Anecdotal evidence has long linked UFO sightings and nuclear tests, but now VASCO have compiled a dataset covering 2,718 days which they have used to compare the dates of transient sightings with the dates of above-ground nuclear tests and the number of UFO reports made. Analysing this, they discovered that transients were 45 per cent more likely to be observed within one day of a nuclear weapons test and that the number of these flashes increased significantly when UFOs were also reported. In fact, they found that the total amount of transient activity increased by 8.5 per cent for every additional UFO sighting, and that UFOs were slightly more common during nuclear testing periods. So, ufologists seem not to have been mistaken when they linked sightings to nuclear testing, and their suspicions have, moreover, been backed up by scientific evidence from astronomical photographs.

What the photos cannot do is resolve what the transients they detect are; they are not detailed enough to show them as more than a point of light, but researchers have discounted the possibility that the transients could be atmospheric debris from the nuclear tests, as they are not streaking across the sky shortly after detonation. In fact, the transients most frequently appear one day after a test, and this correlation also makes it unlikely the flashes are plate defects, as these would not cluster around specific historical dates.

"Our findings provide additional empirical support for the validity of the UAP (UFO) phenomenon and its potential connection to nuclear weapons activity, contributing data beyond eyewitness reports," concluded the researchers in their paper. *S Bruehl, B Villarroel, Transients in the Palomar Observatory Sky Survey (POSS-I) may be associated with nuclear testing and reports of unidentified anomalous phenomena. Sci Rep 15, 34125 (2025). doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-21620-3*

PAY ATTENTION!

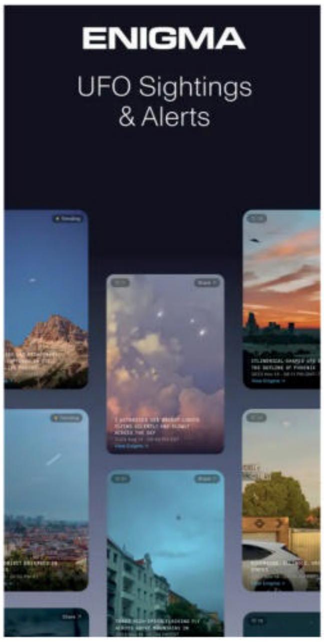
Looking for a way to assess public attention to economic data, economists Dr Nathan Goldstein from Bar-Ilan University and Dr Ohad Raveh at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem decided to use the frequency of UFO sighting reports in the US as a proxy indicator, publishing their results in the *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* journal. "In our study, we examined the relationship between the attention US county residents pay to the skies (UFO sightings from 2000 to 2020) and the attention they give to economic factors, aiming to see if there's overlap," explained Raveh. "To our surprise, we found a strong positive correlation between economic attention and UFO sightings, even when considering factors like weather, mental health and more." He added, "Reports of unidentified aerial phenomena serve as an indirect but effective indicator of public attention to unusual events. The study shows that these reports are linked to economic conditions, meaning they can be used to understand how attention shifts based on economic circumstances."

Looking at which parts of the US were more likely to report UFOs, and when, Raveh said they "found that wealthier areas report more unidentified aerial phenomena, while such reports increase during economic recessions within specific regions, suggesting that public attention shifts more toward unusual events during times of crisis." The researchers believed the public showed more attention to anomalous phenomena like UFOs during recessions because they had more free time or because there was a decline in other distractions as the result of economic factors. *ynetnews.com, 30 Dec 2024.*

USOs AHOY

Enigma, a private start-up company specialising in UFO-related research, runs a popular UFO reporting app that has enabled it to create what it says is the "largest queryable historical sighting database for global UFO sightings", based on more than 30,000 reports received since it launched in 2022. In August, they released a summary of reports relating to Unidentified Submersible Objects (USOs) in US waterways. This showed that Enigma users had logged more than 9,000 USO sightings within 10 miles of US shorelines or major bodies of water since the app launched, and that 500 of them were within five miles of the coast. These included 150 reports describing clearly sighted objects hovering over or descending into the water, one of which came with camera phone video showing unidentified green lights travelling beneath the sea's surface. Maps released by Enigma show clusters of sightings along both the east and west coasts of the USA, with concentrations off California and Florida, which respectively had 389 and 306 reports.

Retired US Navy Rear Admiral Tim Gallaudet has compiled a 29-page report on USOs for the UFO-focused think tank the Sol Foundation and in it he expresses alarm at the amount of USO activity reported off the American coast, saying: "The fact that unidentified objects with unexplainable characteristics are entering US water space and the DOD is not raising a giant red flag is a sign that the Government is not sharing all it knows about all-domain anomalous phenomena." *nypost.com, 26 Oct 2025.*



LEFT: The Enigma UFO reporting app. **BELOW**: Strange goings-on have been reported from Area 51.

Enigma users had logged more than 9,000 USO sightings

AREA 51 WEIRDNESS

In late September something crashed on the periphery of Area 51, the secretive US Air Force experimental range associated with Nellis Airforce Base in Nevada. Authorities were predictably tight-lipped about the nature of the crash and what kind of craft was involved, saying only that "On September 23, 2025, an aircraft assigned to the 432nd Wing was involved in an incident with no fatalities or injuries. The site was secured and guarded until recovery and clean-up operations were completed on September 27th." However, on 3 October, much to everyone's confusion, they put out a further statement saying: "During a follow-on site survey on October 3rd, investigators discovered signs of tampering at the mishap location, including the presence of an inert training bomb body and an aircraft panel of unknown origin that were placed on the site post-incident. The matter is under investigation by Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI) and the FBI."

Also causing raised eyebrows was the size and duration of the Temporary Flight Restriction placed on the area, which ran from 23 September to 1 October, excluding all flights from an area that extended five nautical miles in every direction and covered all airspace up to 15,000 above mean sea level, with the only explanation being "national security". While it is thought that the craft that went down was some kind of drone, the security restrictions around the crash were unusual, as no experimental or otherwise highly restricted drones were thought to be operating in the area, and the claim of tampering is extremely strange. As of going to press, no information has been made available as to what might have been unique or peculiar about the objects used to tamper with the site, such as their age, origin, or placement, nor have any other of the anomalies about this incident been resolved. *twz.com, 6 Oct 2025.*

STOP
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WARNING
WARNING

DAVID JAMES HENRY / CREATIVE COMMONS

SIDELINES...

BARGAIN WITH A STING

Opening her parcel from Chinese discount fashion brand Shein, Bristol student Sofia Alonso-Mossinger, 18, "unzipped the outer packaging and saw something move", then realised it was a live scorpion. "It was scary being in my room with a random scorpion," she said. A flatmate grabbed the creature with tongs, and put it in a box for collection by the National Centre for Reptile Welfare. They identified it as a Chinese scorpion, *Olivierus martensii*, saying its sting was "potentially life threatening, but an average adult would just have a really bad day," adding, "This is the second one we have had in under a month that has come in this way." *telegraph.co.uk, 11 Oct 2024.*

PIZZA THE ACTION

An X group known as *The Pentagon Pizza Report* believe they have come up with a unique way of predicting major world events. They track the use of pizza joints near the Pentagon, the US military headquarters, and believe that a significant increase in footfall indicates that many Pentagon staff are working late on an impending world crisis. Just before the US bombed Tehran they posted: "All nearby pizza establishments have experienced a HUGE surge in activity." They also believe they identified surges before waves of Iranian drone attacks on Israel earlier in the year. Pentagon officials inevitably threw doubt on the correlation, pointing out they have in-house food vendors who are open 24 hours a day. *Times, 18 Jun 2025.*

AMAZON TORRENT

A resident of San Jose, California, was confused by a constant deluge of large parcels being delivered to her house. Each contained a foam cushion with an ill-fitting plastic seat cover, none of which she had ordered. This continued for over a year, and, at its peak, multiple packages were arriving every day. The homeowner turned many away, but some eluded her, resulting in a mountain of packages accumulating in her car port, making it difficult to get out of the front door. The source was eventually traced to an independent seller on Amazon, gaming the system by giving out a random address as their "returns hub", which happened to be the woman's home in San Jose. *abc7ny.com, 10 Jul 2027.*

SIDELINES...

PRIZEWINNING PONG

The *Dull Man* podcast gave a lifetime achievement award to Peter Hansen, 85, for inventing the smell of gas in the 1970s. Natural gas does not have a smell, making it almost impossible to detect leaks, so Hansen came up with a substance to be added to it that provides the characteristic pong that alerts people to a problem. Hansen described the smell as being inspired by "bad eggs" and "flatulence", saying "it is a horrible and naughty smell – it is distinctive," and added that "he could not be more proud" of receiving the award. *D.Mail, 3 Jul 2025.*

BUFFAL-HIGH

Inhabitants of Dadar, a village in Madhya Pradesh in India, were confused when they woke up to find a full-grown buffalo stuck on the roof of a newly-built house. Nadal Yadev, son of the homeowner, said, "We have no idea how it got up there. When we woke up around 5.30am the buffalo was already on the roof." The family had to wait until 2pm for a crane to arrive, which lifted the buffalo off the roof unharmed. *<i>, 12 Jul 2025.*

NOT AT ALL WORRYING

During a routine check on radiation levels, workers at the Savannah River Site, a nuclear installation near Aiken, South Carolina, found a highly radioactive wasps' nest near holding tanks containing liquid nuclear waste, with the wasps giving radiation readings 10 times the safe level allowed by federal regulations. "The nest was sprayed to kill the wasps, then bagged as radiological waste," officials reported, explaining that there was no risk to the public as the nest was deep within the site and wasps only fly short distances. *metro.co.uk, 1 Aug 2025.*

MARTIN ROSS

TRAIN IN VAIN

Florida's "Death Train" continues its reign of terror and van-driving dog causes railway chaos

BBT609 / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

ABOVE: Florida's Brightline rail service has become known as the "Death Train" after 185 fatalities in seven years.

HELLBOUND TRAIN

Florida's Brightline rail service is a cutting edge (for America) high speed train that runs between Orlando and Miami at up to 125mph (200km/h) several times a day. Opening in 2018, it is only the second service of its kind in the US, after the Acela service in the Pacific Northwest, and will serve champagne to its passengers as they relax in the comfort of its bespoke leather seats. However, the Brightline train is gaining a reputation as killer technology having been responsible for more than 185 deaths in the seven years it has been operating. In 2024 alone the train hit and killed 41 people, none of whom appeared to have been committing suicide, while in the same period the busiest US railway, the Long Island Rail Road, killed six people while running 947 trains a day. Locals have taken to calling the Brightline the "Death Train" and Florida folklore now has it that the train must be "fed" regularly to keep hurricanes away, with victims described as a "track snack".

Operators and Florida authorities seem mystified as to why the train is so lethal, although there has been suggestions that is because of the "Florida Man" syndrome, with Jim Kovalsky, the president of the Florida East Coast Railway Society, saying, "I think the concept of Florida Man is real, unfortunately – we are dealing with a lot of people that don't understand self-preservation." While others suggest that running a high speed train on lines with little fencing and with many basic road crossings is the problem, because people are used to being able to see the usual slow moving trains approaching while the Brightline moves far too fast for humans to get out of the way. *theatlantic.com, 22 Oct 2025.*

TRAIN-SMOKERS

In January 2025, a 40-year-old Hungarian man got off a high-speed train heading for Nuremberg to have a fag break, but failed to reboard in time, so jumped on to the outside and clung to a bracket between carriages, hanging on for 19 miles at speeds of up to 175mph (282km/h) until police stopped the train and removed him.

In August 2025, someone repeated the stunt; a 24-year-old Algerian man hopped off a 140mph (230km/h) Railjet service at St Poelten, near Vienna, to have a smoke, and also missed its departure. Rather than remain on the platform, he jumped into the gap between two carriages and started to bang on the windows to attract attention. As a result, the train carried out an emergency stop and took the man onboard. Police were waiting for him when the train arrived at Vienna's Meidling Station and, according to one passenger, "The conductor really had a very big go at him". Austrian railways spokesperson Herbert Hofer said: "It is irresponsible – this kind of thing usually ends up with someone dying." *theguardian.com, 11 Aug 2025.*

CANINE VAN-DAL

A van driver, who understandably asked not to be named, parked his vehicle on the hill leading down to Knaresborough Station, leaving his French bulldog, Reggie, inside. Before he could return to the van, though, it rolled off down Kirkgate, with Reggie still in it. A witness describing the incident said that the van missed his house "by a matter of mere inches," adding that, "By that point it had got so much speed built up that when it hit the barrier gate onto the railway track, it smashed right through the level crossing, sent the gate flying onto the railway track and eventually came to a stop because it smashed into the signal box." The wrecked van ended up stuck across the main railway line between Harrogate and York, disrupting the morning commuter services until it could be removed. Investigators examining the runaway vehicle found that Reggie, who survived the incident unharmed, had entertained himself during his owner's absence by chewing through the brake cable, releasing the brakes and allowing the van to hurtle through the town leaving behind a trail of destruction, but fortunately, no casualties. *BBC News, 19 Jul 2025.*

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

The curious case of the J6 pipe bomber continues. As the FBI produce a new suspect, **NOEL ROONEY** considers the claims being made by those with conspiratorial skin in the game.

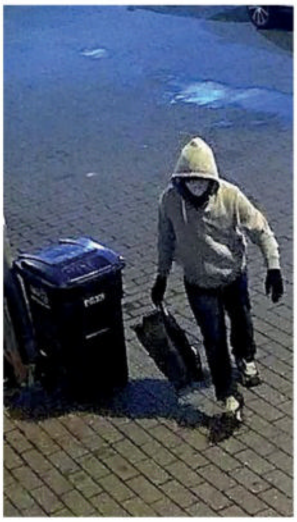
PIPE BOMBER II

At times, the back and forth between the mainstream media (often echoed by the federal authorities) and the Conspirasphere (along with the alternative media) resembles a playground game of tit-for-tat. The J6 pipe bomb saga is a case in point. It all goes quiet for a while – bar dark mutterings from the deeper sections of the rabbit hole – and then everyone has something to say all at once. And invariably, what comes up from either side tends to depend to some extent on what the opposition are saying.

In November, the Blaze, an online news portal that is proudly conservative and pro-Trump, published a story identifying the pipe bomber as an ex-police officer, now working for the CIA (**FT465:11**). The story was based on analysis of video content from security cameras around the DNC headquarters in Washington, and confidently claimed that the bomber was female, had a slight limp, and appeared to signal or wave to other police officers during her explosive jaunt.

The story went speedily viral and engendered both a kind of Eureka moment for the C-sphere and a red flag for the mainstream media. The FBI, which, up until that point, had apparently been incapable of progressing the case despite a mountain of video footage, sprang into action (or at least reviewed a few files) and came up with an alternative suspect. Curiously, some of the information released about the new suspect is quite similar to a person of interest identified by the Blaze (or its expert witnesses) as a potential collaborator with the woman they tagged as the actual bomber.

The original Blaze story has now been retracted; the language of the retraction makes it clear that this was done reluctantly, but in a public spirited way, naturally, and that this is likely not the end of the saga. The Blaze claims it is giving everyone the chance to have a good look at the evidence and decide for themselves. The MSM claims the Blaze simply got it wrong. Consensus seems unlikely at this point.



How the shoes led the FBI to the suspect is a little opaque

The FBI also used video analysis to identify the suspect. In their case, it was all about a pair of shoes. The trainers worn by the pipe bomber are top of the range, quite unusual and, as some sources have opined, more likely to be worn by a black person than a white one. (Quite how shoes work as an ethnic marker is beyond this writer.) How the shoes led the FBI to the suspect is a little opaque at this point, but no doubt will become clear in time.

Brian Cole, the alleged suspected terrorist according to the FBI is, according to his family, a neuro-divergent recluse with a mental age of 16. He has no political leanings, apparently, and thus it is hard (at least for his family) to fathom a motive for his alleged actions. As more details emerge – assuming they do; cases of this kind have been known to go quiet for long periods – we will no doubt learn more about Cole and his motives. In the meantime, some alternative news sites have feasted on Cole's race as proof that the official narrative about J6 must be wrong.

That is to say, the deep state cover-up of the incident is assumed, but the alt media are flexible about the reasons for it. If the Feds weren't hiding the fact that the pipe bomb affair was a state-sponsored false flag, then they were really hiding the fact that a black person planted the bombs, because that would somehow prove that the stories about Antifa infiltrating and inciting the crowd on the fateful day were true.

This would all be predictably risible under normal circumstances; but little about the events of 6 January 2021 is normal. Almost five years on, several hundred people have been arrested, convicted and imprisoned, only to be pardoned and freed (also reluctantly according to the more MAGA observers) by the incoming Trump administration. The pipe bomb story itself was, frankly, buried by the MSM as soon as it turned complicated; explaining how or why the security services left Kamala Harris inside the DNC building when they apparently knew there was a bomb planted outside it, for instance, was much too slippery for a pat answer.

The new developments make the story yet more complicated, though to date I haven't seen anyone addressing that problem. If Cole is not connected to a political group, his potential motives are bewildering opaque. Why would he want to plant bombs at those locations on that date if he didn't have an axe to grind, one way or the other? And how could he know in advance that things would kick off in the way they did? If he chose that day to plant bombs, one has to assume he wanted to have an effect on events; but which side would be his target?

The MAGA crowd are far too wedded to their grand J6 narrative, it seems, to ask the obvious questions. There may be some traditional conspiracists out there, even now, poring over such evidence as is in the public domain; but to date their voices have not been heard above the partisan din. And the authorities, closely followed by the legacy media, have managed to make what could have been a straightforward piece of detection and a slam dunk arrest into a vague story full of potential holes; how on earth did the FBI allow tabloid publications to get a potentially undermining story out about the family before locking it down?

I think this game has a few more rounds to play before we get to anything resembling the truth of the pipe bombing affair.

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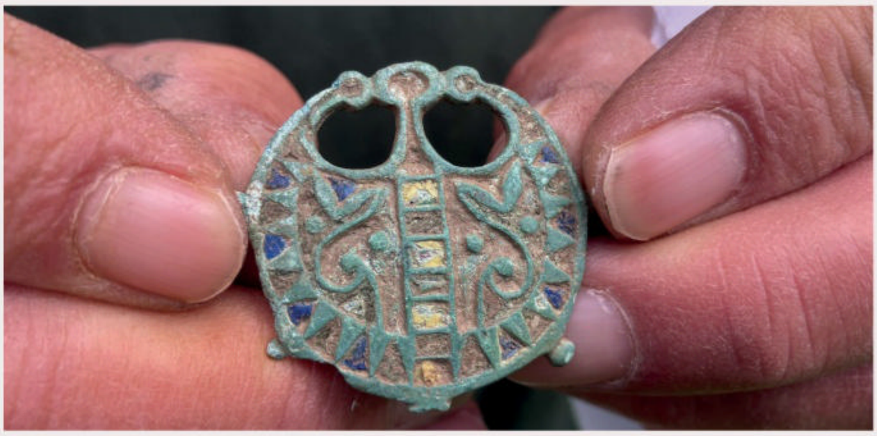
www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15358571/January-6-pipe-bomber-autistic-recluse-computer-nerd-grieving-loss-pet-chihuahua.html

theconservativetreehouse.com/blog/2025/12/05/wild-coincidence-j6-pipe-bomb-suspect-is-mentally-simple-his-father-also-brian-cole-worked-with-civil-rights-lawyer-ben-crump-a-close-personal-friend-of-pam-bondiie/

PAUL SIEVEKING digs up the latest archæological news, including some rare finds and unusual cures



JEROLYN MORRISON

ABOVE LEFT: The 2,000-year-old brooch unearthed near Dorchester. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Archæologists have found a rare unlooted Etruscan tomb to the northwest of Rome.

2,000-YEAR-OLD BROOCH

A metal detectorist who unearthed a rare 2,000-year-old brooch said he initially thought it was only "a kid's toy". Martin Turner made the discovery in fields near his home near Dorchester, Dorset, and said after he washed it he noticed it had "bronze disease" and thought it must be old. He sent it to his local finds liaison officer, who confirmed its age and would now like to document it. If it does not get claimed then it will be given back to Mr Turner, who said he might donate it to a local museum. *BBC News, 23 Sept 2025*.

ROMAN FOSSIL AMULETS

At the Roman settlement of A Cibdá de Armea in northwestern Spain, archæologists have uncovered evidence suggesting that ancient Romans adorned their amulets with fossils of extinct marine arthropods, like trilobites, possibly rooted in the belief that these specimens carried magical or protective powers. Dated to between the first and third centuries AD, the discovered trilobite fossil holds several remarkable distinctions: it is the first ever confirmed from Roman times, one of only three known worldwide to have been deliberately collected and used by humans over 1,000 years ago, and the 11th trilobite ever found in an archæological context. It also showed clear signs of intentional modifications made so it could be worn as a pendant or bracelet.

The trilobite was unearthed in the same archæological layer as a bronze coin of Emperor Augustus, which isn't surprising as it aligns with historical accounts describing Augustus's fascination with fossils during the Roman era. According to the historian Suetonius, Augustus was an avid collector who not only imported fossils from Greece but also personally excavated them on the island of Capri. He is also credited with creating one of the first known palæontological museums at his villa, where he displayed the bones of ancient giants and monsters, which we call fossils.

The researchers did not find any holes or perforations in the trilobite fossil; however, they hypothesise that the trilobite could still have been worn as jewellery, probably set using a crimp or embedded in metal like gold or silver. Microscopic examination and high-contrast photographs of the fossil revealed human-made modifications, such as seven artificial facets on the left and underside of the specimen, which were likely created to flatten the fossil for use within a pendant or bracelet. *phys.org, 28 July 2025*.

ETRUSCAN TOMB UNLOOTED

A rare untouched tomb from the Etruscans has been discovered in central Italy. The tomb, carved from stone in the shape of a small house, contains the remains of four individuals lying on stone beds. The remains are surrounded by more than 100 artefacts, including pottery, weapons, bronze ornaments and silver hair accessories. Though many other Etruscan tombs have been excavated in the area, all have been subject to some degree of looting. The pristine tomb, dates to the seventh century BC and could offer insight into the Etruscans' burial practices.

The Etruscan civilisation thrived in central Italy in the centuries before the Roman Republic, peaking around the sixth century BC, before gradually falling to Rome in the Roman-Etruscan Wars. Etruria was officially assimilated into the Roman Empire in the first century BC.

Archæologists discovered the sealed tomb in the ancient Etruscan town of San Giuliano, about 43 miles (70km) northwest of Rome. Preliminary data suggest that the four individuals buried in the tomb are two male-female pairs, but further analysis could provide additional insights. *www.livescience.com, 22 July 2025*.

WHY THE WEASEL TESTICLES?

While people from the Middle Ages faced many of the same ailments experienced by patients today, they tackled them rather differently. One manuscript, dating from the 15th century, suggested women could cure their infertility by burning weasel testicles in a pot with mouse-ear – a type of chickweed – to create pessaries that are placed in the cervix for three days. "After these three days however, she should have intercourse with a man and she should conceive without delay," the manuscript states. Another recipe suggests curing lice using a mixture of mercury and roasted apples.

Yet, while some of the remedies might seem alarming to modern eyes, Dr James Freeman, the curator of an exhibition in Cambridge University Library, said: "Mediæval people were intelligent, rational, curious and intensely interested in trying to understand how the body functions and what caused and what could cure disease." The exhibition explored how people of the time thought the body worked, including the idea of the four humours developed by the Roman doctor Galen. There was a 'sympathetic' medical idea that things that correspond with parts of the human body would therefore be beneficial for them. "Hence, I suspect, the weasel testicles being used as part of a remedy for infertility," Freeman said. However, he noted that many of the recipes do not give a source or rationale, with some – such as the apple and mercury cure for lice – apparently based on personal experience or hearsay. *Guardian 28 Mar 2025*.

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

318: OZY, NOT OZZIE

Not sure how much Fort knew or cared about ancient Egypt. However, Steinmeyer's biography (p29) says history, "of certain romantic eras", was his favourite school subject, so the odds are that he will have had some acquaintance with it.

He was predictably stirred by the discovery of King Tut's tomb in 1922. There are three references in his *Books* (678, 701, 884) to the supposed curse. I'd like to think he shared my puzzlement that only Lord Carnarvon was struck down, not archæologist Howard Carter, the actual 'despoiler' of the tomb.

This event may have been on Fort's mind when he penned the opening sentences of *The Book of the Damned*: "A procession of the damned. By the damned, I mean the excluded… Some of them are corpses, skeletons, mummies, twitching, tottering, animated by companions that have been damned alive…"

Now, of course, to Percy Bysshe Shelley and his 1817 poem "Ozymandias":

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said – "Two vast and trunkless stones
Stand in the desert…
And on the pedestal these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and
Despair!

Shelley's poem must have been inspired by this descriptive passage in Diodorus Siculus's *Universal History* (bk1 chs46-7); cf. J Gwyn Griffiths, *The Modern Language Review 43* (1948), pp.80-84. Detailing the great statue of Ozymandias, Diodorus quotes the inscription on its pedestal: "I am Ozymandias, King of Kings. If anyone would know how great I am, let him survey one of my works."

Shelley will have read a lot of Greek at Eton and Oxford. The name of Ozymandias derives from 'Usermaatre', the throne name of Ramesses II (1279-1213 BC), of whom there is a splendid recent biography by Toby Wilkinson; cf. the comprehensive review-essay by Elizabeth Frood, *TLS*, 13 Oct 2023, p24.

Ramesses is famous for many things: buildings, military triumphs, polyphiloprogenitor. He is credited with siring around 100 children, more or less equally divided between the genders. His efforts in this field are highlighted in *Moses, Prince of Egypt* by American communist novelist Howard Fast, author of *Spartacus*. Comparable here are King Priam of Troy, who produced 50 sons and 50 daughters, also King Danaus of Libya who (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk10 v63) came up with 50 daughters, balancing the 50 sons of his twin brother Aegyptus, King of Egypt.

These marvels of precise family planning might (or might not) be deemed highly appropriate, since both Ramses and Trojan are contraceptive brand names in North America.

Some websites claim that Herodotus (bk2 ch124) meant Ramesses when he was writing about the Pharaoah Rhampsinitus. This can hardly be right, since Herodotus puts him chronologically before Cheops, builder of the Great Pyramid, who came long before; cf. *Land of the Pharaoahs* with Jack Hawkins as Cheops, co-starring as his scheming queen a young Joan Collins, always good for inspiring erections.

Herodotus unavoidably made mistakes about Egyptian history, being at the mercy of dragoman guides and priests, but not on this scale; cf. Alan B Lloyd, 'Herodotus' Account of Pharaonic History,' *Historia* 37 (1988), pp.22-53. He goes on to relate, while disbelieving them, local yarns about Rhampsinitus descending to Hades to play dice with the goddess Demeter, "sometimes winning, sometimes losing", and later back on Earth being saved from danger by a pair of wolves.

In Cecil B DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*, Yul Brynner gave an award-winning performance as Ramesses. Casting him as the Pharaoh of the Exodus was the ideal cinematic choice. But it may have been the wrong one. The Book of Exodus does not name the Pharaoh. There are many rival nominations, catalogued in detail by Christopher Eames on the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archæology website, to be read in conjunction with John Gee's 'Who was NOT the Pharaoh of the Exodus,' in *Farms Review of Books* 9 (1997), pp.43-50, online.

Ancient suggestions were one of the Thutmoses (Josephus), one of the Amenhoteps (Manetho, third-century BC Egyptian historian, possibly in the best place to know), Bakenramef (Tacitus), and most exotically the female ruler Hatshepsut (Diodorus Siculus).

Among the moderns, Freud (yes, that one) opted for the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten. Isaac Asimov plumped for Merneptah. The incorrigible Velikovsky invented an unknown pharaoh whom he dubbed Tom-Taoui-Toth. The same battle rages among academic archæologists and historians.

Mernepthah deserves some extra attention. Since his mummy was not found with the other royal ones in the Valley of the Kings, it was excitedly thought that he must have been drowned in the Red Sea during the famous Israelite crossing. However, it was later discovered in another cache. Nor is it certain that the pursuing pharaoh was himself drowned. DeMille may have been right in having Ramesses watch his army go down and return home. Exodus 14, 21 says all the soldiers drowned, but makes no mention of the pharaoh.

Still, it will not do to end with Egypt's greatest military ruler in defeat. Ramesses, distinguishing himself for personal courageous combat, defeated Hittite opponent King Muwatalli II in May 1274 BC. It is famous for being the greatest-ever clash of chariots, estimates ranging between five to six thousand – somebody could have made a fortune out of a congestion charge.

In Homer's *Iliad*, old King Nestor recalls chariot charges from his youth, the implication being they had gone out of fashion. The general Homeric impression is of warriors riding to the battlefield in a kind of U-Drive, then getting out to duel on foot. See Anthony Spalinger, 'The Battle of Kadesh: The Chariot Frieze at Abydos', *Egypt and the Levant 13* (2003), pp.163-99.

Ramesses had a notable edifice complex, scattering his statues and temples like rabbit-droppings. Would he have been offended by the moving of his Abu Simbel temple to construct the Aswan Dam? For more on all of this, see online articles by Alexander Roberts and Owen Jarus, the former comparing the Aswan Dam with the Hoover.

What would have pleased Ramesses would have been the self-identification with him by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, evinced in detail in an online pæan by Amr Saleh.

All the old paintings on the tombs,
They do the sand-dance, don't you know?
If they move too quick (oh whey oh)
They're falling down like a domino.

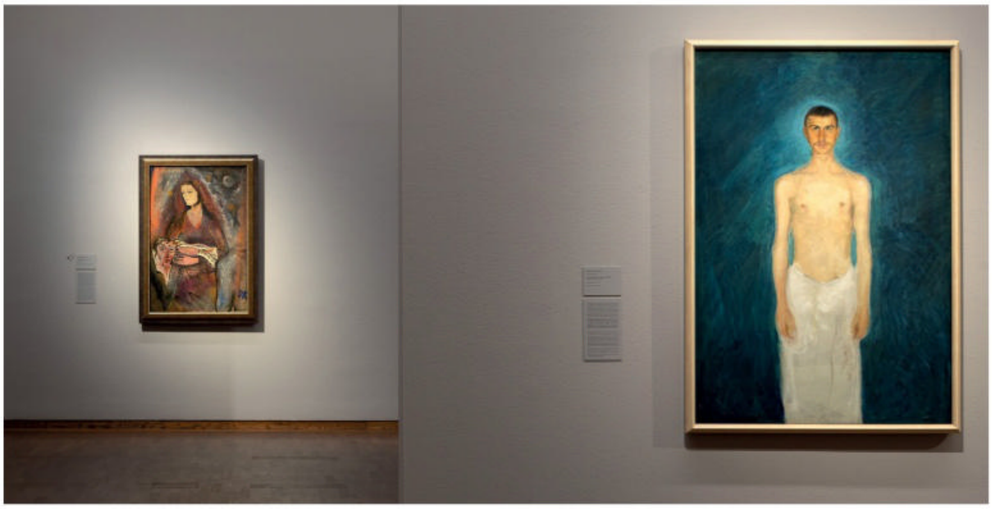
Opening verse from 'Walk like an Egyptian' by The Bangles. Poor old Ramesses in old age had advanced arthritis which made him stagger along with a hunch back. Presumably, his impregnating days were over…

EXHIBITION REPORT

WHEN HABSBURGS WALTZED WITH SPIRITS:

VIENNA'S OCCULT UNDERWORLD UNVEILED

ROB WEINBERG visits Vienna's Leopold Museum, where an exhibition reveals the Austrian capital's secret history, revealing how Spiritualism, Theosophy and esoteric practices influenced the city's Modernist revolution.



LEOPOLD MUSEUM, WIEN / VIENNA, FOTO / OLIVER OTTENSCHLÄGER

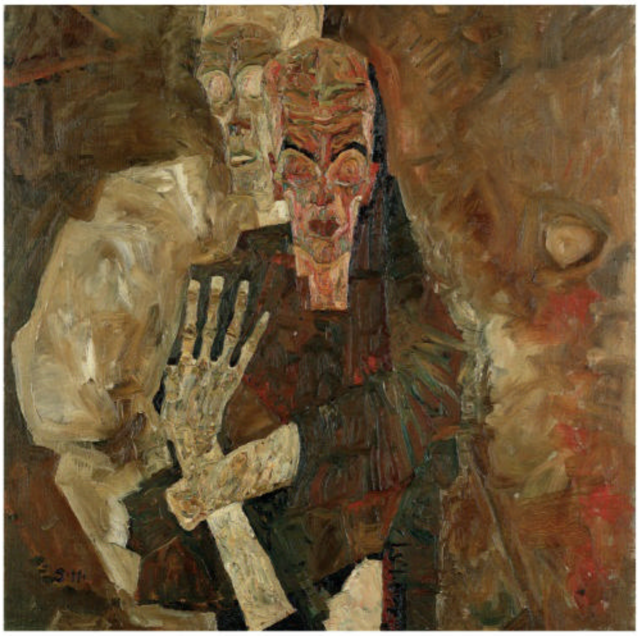
LEFT: Canvases by Oscar Kokoschka and Richard Gerstl on display at the exhibition. **BELOW**: Egon Schiele, *Selbstseher“ II (“Tod und Mann”),* oil on canvas, 1911.

Behind the imposing facades and glittering, gilded ballrooms of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna lay an altogether more shadowy world. While Sigmund Freud was developing psychoanalysis and Gustav Klimt draped ecstatic lovers in golden iconography, Vienna's intelligentsia were blurring the boundaries between reason and mysticism, science and superstition, progress and reaction. Departed souls dictated poetry to empresses, scientists examined the supernatural claims of Indian mystics, and mediums held court in grand salons.

Vienna's peculiar susceptibility to occultist thinking arose at a particular historical moment. The city faced profound political and cultural crises that conventional institutions seemed powerless to address. Narrow ethnic nationalism fragmented the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire. Liberalism, which had promised enlightened progress, was visibly failing. The Catholic Church stifled intellectual inquiry with suffocating dogmatism. Yet scientific materialism offered no spiritual sustenance.

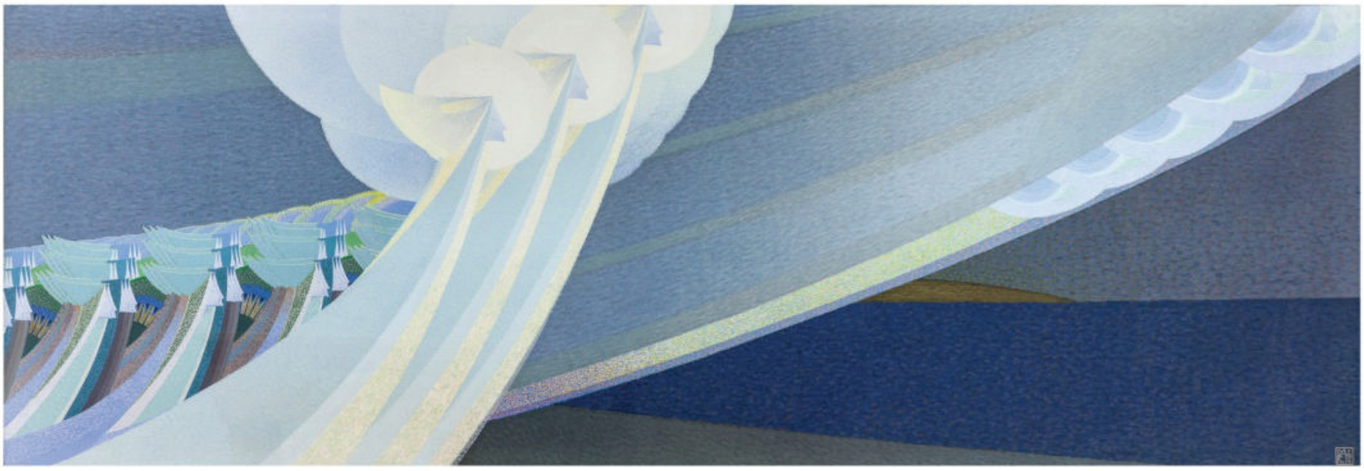
> *Occultism and Spiritualism offered hope in a world on the edge of catastrophe*

Many educated Viennese found themselves trapped in a devastating 'value vacuum', caught between an oppressive Catholicism and a sterile materialism that fed neither the soul nor the imagination. Occultism and Spiritualism offered an elegant solution: universal spiritual truths that transcended national or historical baggage and institutional constraint. They promised transformation and hope in a world teetering on the edge of catastrophe. Contemporary observers spoke of Vienna experiencing a "cheerful apocalypse" – a sense of inhabiting the "experimental ground for the end of the world". In such an atmosphere, the boundaries between the possible and impossible dissolved. The occult offered what the established order could not: agency in a world perceived as collapsing.



LEOPOLD MUSEUM, VIENNA

Out of this strange and complex society, a striking paradox emerged: the cultural movements celebrated as pinnacles of rational Modernism thrived on Vienna's foray into spirituality, mysticism and the occult. How did this preoccupation with the intangible capture the imagination of Vienna's finest creative minds? Through some 250 paintings, sculptures, photographs and drawings prompted by spirits, *Hidden Modernism: The Fascination with the Occult Around 1900* explores the revolutionary artistic techniques that were developed to render the invisible visible. Painters began attempting to depict character, mood, as well as spiritual essence itself – the aura that Theosophical texts insisted surrounded every living thing. They abandoned naturalistic colour in favour of visionary palettes designed to convey inner states rather than external appearances. As might be expected, the finest works on display come from some of the outstanding modernist names: Munch, Kokoschka and Schiele all developed novel techniques to infuse



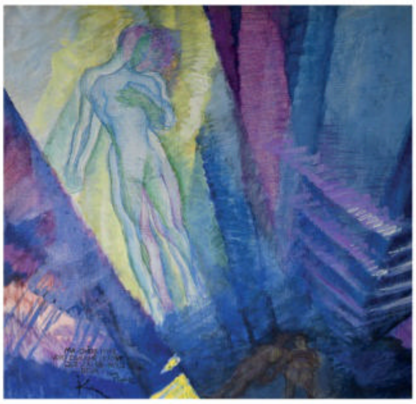
ABOVE: Erich Mallina, *Engelszug,* ('Angel Procession'), tempera on canvas, 1904. **BELOW**: František Kupka, *Le Rêve*, oil on cardboard, c.1909. **BOTTOM**: Wassily Kandinsky, *Landscape with Church* (Landscape with Red Spots I), oil on canvas, 1913.

KUNST-DOKUMENTATION.COM/MANUEL CARREON LOPEZ

their portraits with an auratic dimension.

Egon Schiele was steeped in Theosophy and occult knowledge. He explicitly described himself as "a seer or even a clairvoyant," and his revolutionary approach to portraiture attempted nothing less than the visual representation of spiritual emanations. Paint was applied thickly and violently so that each brushstroke seems to carry its own vibration. Schiele's 1910 *Portrait of Arthur Roessler* portrays his patron with closed eyes, immersed in "a material, cloudy fog of a beautiful rose colour", echoing illustrations in Theosophical texts. Rather than capturing likeness, Schiele is striving to capture the man's essence.

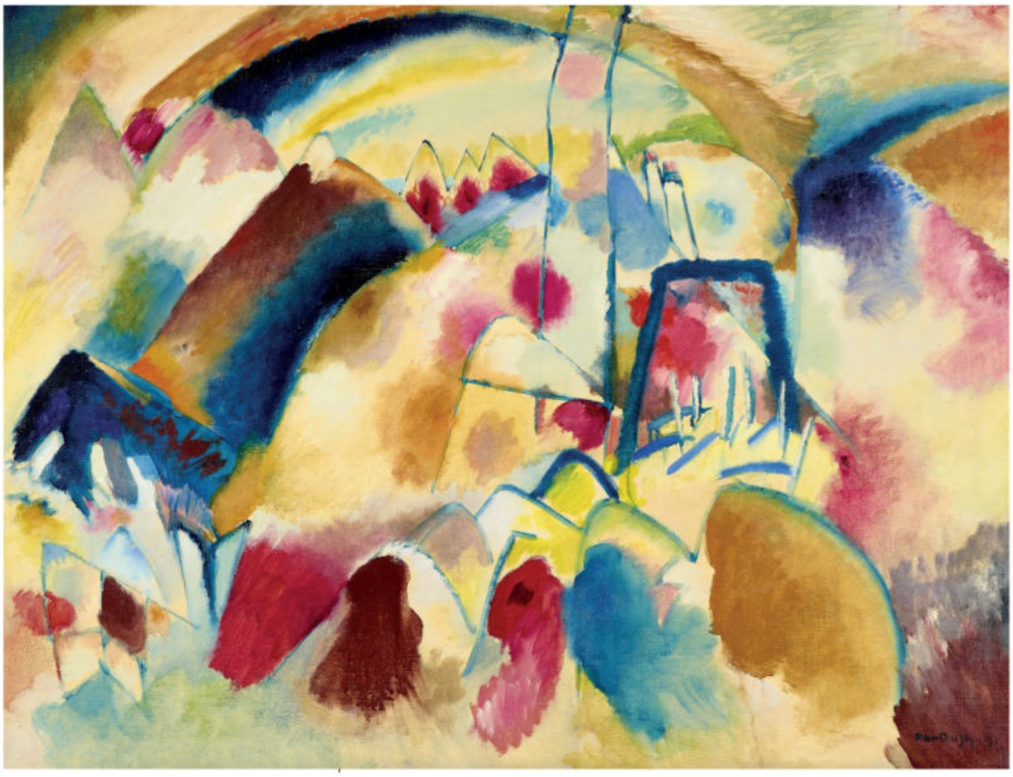
Describing his 1911 painting *Revelation*, Schiele wrote: "The painting must give off light – the bodies generate their own light, which they consume in the process of living – they burn." In *Transfiguration*, probably the outstanding painting on display here, Schiele boldly dissolves the border between this world and the beyond. Two ascetic figures, which Schiele modelled on himself, embody two stages of death: the lower figure points to his inevitable demise while his dead-eyed, green-tinted counterpart is simultaneously levitating above him and merging with its surroundings. It is a visual, visceral depiction of spiritual and organic transformation.



PRESSEAMT STADT BOCHUM/LUTZ LEITMANN © BILDRECHT, WIEN 2025

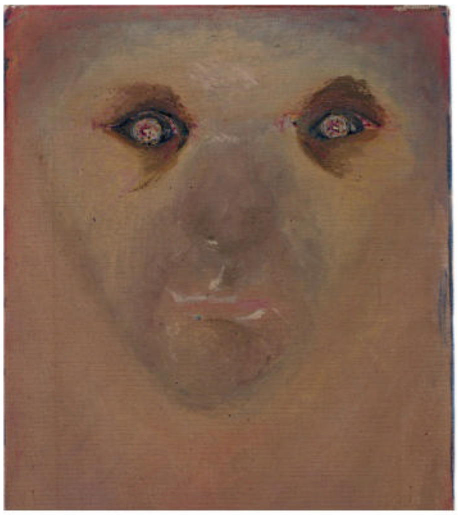
Oskar Kokoschka's 1909 portrait *Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat* takes a different approach to occultist visualisation. The work is studded with bundles of rays, clear emanations of light scratched into the canvas that also recall illustrations in Theosophical literature. A married couple are about to join hands, creating a bridge leading into the spiritual realm beyond, filled with iridescent colour. Small whirls above Tietze's head document Kokoschka's keen interest in the nervous system, which he believed functioned as an organ transmitting oscillations into the ether.

For pioneers of abstraction like František Kupka, occultist thinking offered a philosophical justification for moving beyond representation. Remarkably, Kupka earned his living as a

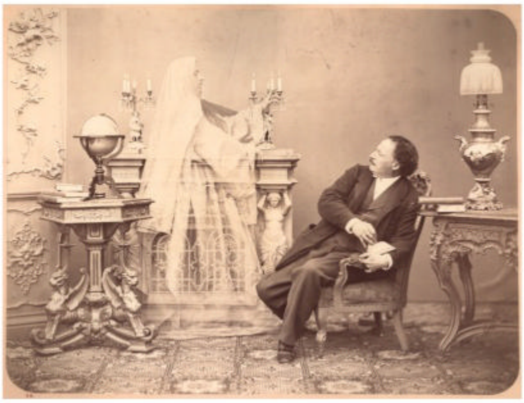


MUSEUM FOLKWANG ESSEN – ARTOTHEK

EXHIBITION REPORT



ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG CENTER, VIENNA



ALBERTINA, VIENNA

LEFT: Arnold Schoenberg, *Gaze*, oil on canvas, 1910.
ABOVE: Adolf Ost, *Apparition of a Spirit,* albumen paper on mounting cardboard, before 1864.

professional medium while revolutionising modern art. The Russian Expressionist pioneer Wassily Kandinsky articulated the connection explicitly in 1911: “This nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, useless game, has not yet passed.” For Kandinsky, as for Johannes Itten – later a Bauhaus professor – occultist thinking illuminated the path toward pure abstraction, art that communicated directly with the soul.

Inevitably, eccentric reformers and outright fraudsters could be found among Vienna’s many occult figures; some inhabited the ambiguous space between the two. Kupka was briefly drawn to Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach, an artist-prophet and vegetarian reformer mockingly known as the “kohlrabi apostle.” Diefenbach established a commune in a stone quarry where he propagated radical clothing, meat-free diets and liberal child-rearing practices. He was also an enthusiastic nudist who spent six weeks in prison for “grave misconduct” – a fact that eventually disillusioned the earnest Kupka.

Yet Diefenbach’s creative projects were genuinely ambitious. His 1895 *Sphinx* reinterpreted the iconic Giza monument through Theosophical symbolism. His only surviving architectural design was for a megalomaniacal, three-tiered Egyptian ziggurat serving simultaneously as a temple, the artist’s own mausoleum, and an orphanage. Unsurprisingly, Diefenbach never found the funding or suitable land. His 1902 painting *Thou Shalt Not Kill* is considered the first political artwork explicitly opposing hunting and meat consumption, prefiguring modern animal rights activism by decades.

Artists exploring the “fourth dimension” drew upon an emerging technology: spirit photography, produced from the 1860s onward using double exposure techniques. Edvard Munch, who exerted a profound influence on the Viennese art scene, conducted rarely seen photographic experiments in this mode. He spoke lyrically of eyes possessing “different abilities” – faculties enabling people to perceive the “mere wicks” (skeletons) beneath skin, and the “outer flame rings” (auras) surrounding all living things. His renderings of this dual vision influenced the proto-Expressionist Richard Gerstl. His self-portraits feature glowing blue auras around his head and body, preceding Abstract Expressionism by decades.

An unlikely painter on display here is the composer Arnold Schoenberg who attempted to paint himself; the results demonstrate that Schoenberg’s talents lay more in music than visual art.

Perhaps most fascinating are the mediumistic drawings on show – works allegedly produced through direct spiritual channelling – including remarkable examples from Therese Vallent and Emilie Mediz-Pelikan. Vallent had shown no artistic talent whatsoever until 1899, when she began holding soft pencils vertically without allowing them to touch the paper’s surface. Using swift, confident strokes, she produced large-format drawings of “moon flowers” and hybrid animal species “also living on the moon,” each meticulously named and prompted by her invisible spirit guide, called Ralph. Vallent’s career illuminates both the scientific interest in occultism and its troubling reception.

In October 1899, her performances caused a sensation when the Scientific Association for Occultism invited her to demonstrate her abilities at the Association of Engineers and Architects. Before a planned three-day exhibition could open, however, police prohibited it “in the interest of the public”, a revealing phrase suggesting official anxiety about occultism’s appeal. Whether the product of genuine channelling, unconscious automatism or deliberate fraud, the drawings themselves possess an eerie, consistent strangeness.

Tragically, many of Vienna’s progressive thinkers developed ideas that would in time have a hugely destructive effect on 20th-century Europe. Guido List developed theories of an original “Ario-Germanic” society led by priests called Armans. List’s 1908 work *Das Geheimnis der Runen* (‘The Secret of the Runes’) established esoteric runology and inspired “rune gymnastics”, a sort of Germanic yoga that would later be appropriated by the Nazis. Even more dangerous was Adolf Joseph Lanz, aka Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, a former Cistercian monk who founded the Ordo Novi Templi and developed “Ario-Christianity” by reinterpreting Biblical scripture through explicitly racist and sexist lenses. Based at Werfenstein castle on the Danube, Lanz integrated occult theories with racial pseudo-science (see **FT81:37-40; 175:34-35; 48-52; 196:32-39, 218:32-39, 369:46-53**). Disturbingly, half of List’s Vienna-based society consisted of Germans who would subsequently found groups directly influencing the emergence of the Nazi Party. What began as transcendent spiritual seeking ended as ideological poison.

What this exhibition makes clear is that in Vienna, the Enlightenment promise of reason and progress had collided with historical reality. For many of the city’s finest minds, filling the resulting spiritual void required transgression, crossing boundaries between the rational and irrational, the scientific and mystical. These alternative manifestations of modernity existed in genuine tension with established notions of Viennese Modernism, representing competing cultural tendencies that have received only marginal scholarly attention until now. In birthing modern psychology, revolutionary art, and groundbreaking music, Vienna was a city where the impossible seemed perpetually possible and where the line between genius and madness remained tantalisingly ambiguous; its artists painted light that burned, bodies that glowed, and souls that refused to die.

Hidden Modernism: The Fascination with the Occult around 1900 is showing at the Leopold Museum, Vienna, until 18 January. More info at https://www.leopoldmuseum.org/en/exhibitions/146/hidden-modernism 2026

The silphium enigma

DAVID HAMBLING explores an enduring culinary mystery from the ancient world

Silphium was a valuable commodity in ancient times, a herb worth its weight in silver. It was a popular cookery ingredient, versatile medicine, perfume component, and supposedly an aphrodisiac. But silphium disappeared, leaving mysteries surrounding its identity and how it was lost (**FT221:77**).

Silphium stalks were roasted, sauteed or boiled and eaten as a vegetable, and the roots were pickled. Sheep that grazed on the herb were said to be the tastiest. Mainly though, silphium resin was grated to add flavour to savoury dishes. It was a huge, expensive fad among gourmets. In Aristophanes' comedy *The Birds*, an early foodie is too concerned with the sauce he is making to notice when a delegation from Olympus materialises in his kitchen.

"We are three gods," Poseidon announces.

"I'm grating silphium," replies the distracted chef.

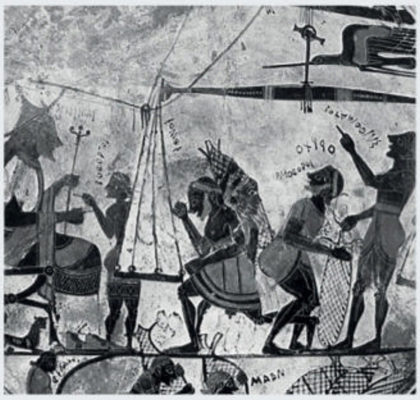
Silphium only grew near the city of Cyrene in modern-day Libya. It was so important to the economy that it was the city's emblem and depicted on the reverse side of its coinage. These images on coins are important in identifying silphium, also known as silphion. We also have descriptions from the Roman writer Theophrastus who noted its small yellow flowers and thick roots covered in black bark.

Botanists believe silphium was in the group of Ferula or fennel-like plants which grow wild across North Africa and the Mediterranean. Two types, giant Tangier fennel and giant fennel, are still found in Libya today.

Ancient writers were emphatic that true silphium only grew in a small area, and could not be cultivated. Its range was the sea-facing side of the Jebel al-Akhdar plateau or Green Mountain, a fertile, forested region about 125 by 35 miles (201 by 56km) in size. Attempts to grow it inevitably ended in failure.

Silphium supported Cyrene for centuries, but the Roman Empire's insatiable appetite for exotic foods spelled trouble. The Romans recognised the dangers of over-exploitation and attempted to limit the harvest; Roman landowners fenced their land to prevent local sheep from grazing silphium.

Limiting the supply drove up prices and led to a black market in illicit herbs as well as many fakes and imitations. Interestingly, the Romans thought the best substitute was asafoetida, which they called Median Silphium. This is another member of the Ferula family still used in Indian cookery today.



WELLCOME COLLECTION

LEFT: Weighing and loading of Silphium at Cyrene, seventh century BC.

Ancient writers stated that silphium only grew in a small area and could not be cultivated

According to Pliny, over the course of 50 years, over-harvesting and over-grazing led to the complete disappearance of silphium in the first century AD. This is the first recorded extinction, and led to a sharp decline in Cyrene's fortunes.

In recent years researchers have suggested that another factor may have been at work: desertification. Like much of North Africa, Jebel al-Akhdar was becoming more arid and less fertile, and this may have spelled the end of silphium even without over-exploitation.

The mysteries of what silphium was and why it was impossible to cultivate may be linked. A leading theory is that it was a hybrid of two separate species. Hybridisation is common in horticulture as a way of combining the desirable properties of different plants, but often results in offspring which do not reproduce sexually. Famous examples include the Cavendish bananas, which account for 99 per cent of the commercially exported crop, and Navel oranges. Neither produces viable seed; Cavendish trees are grown from corms, and Navel trees from cuttings.

If silphium was a wild hybrid, it may have been impossible to grow from seed. It may also have been very particular about soil type. This is still an issue with some plants, such as huckleberry, a popular fruit in the US which is grows wild and is picked to make jams, pies, muffins and other treats, but has defied all attempts at cultivation.

There are other theories. While most writers insist that silphium disappeared in the first century, there are references to it in later eras, such as the cargo manifest of a ship sailing from Cyrene in the fifth century. Were these later references mistakes, or was the word later applied to other herbs? Or did the silphium crop recover, without resuming its previous popularity?

Some researchers believe that silphium still exists, but passes unnoticed due to 'plant blindness,' the tendency to overlook plants. Possible candidates include giant fennel *Ferula communis* and *Thapsia garganica*, or 'deadly carrot' which has significant pharmaceutical properties.

Mahmut Miski of Istanbul University, believes silphium is *Ferula drudeana*, which now grows in Turkey (**FT437:10**). Like silphium it is a favourite food of sheep and goats, it looks similar, has medicinal uses, and is almost impossible to cultivate.

It is just possible that we will find out. Huge quantities of silphium were shipped around the ancient world; a record of Julius Cæsar's treasury shows more than half a ton of it, presumably as resin. There are numerous Roman shipwrecks, and new technology can identify the organic matter found in them. Archæologists have been able to identify grapes, pomegranates and other foodstuffs from ancient wrecks. The discovery of an amphora of silphium could yield genetic material and enable researchers to finally determine the herb's true identity.

Could this super-delicious, super-rare herb become a culinary craze? Roman tastes were not so different to our own. Food researchers have drawn on ancient recipes to recreate garum, a universal Roman sauce made from fermented fish which was as popular as tomato ketchup is today. It is not unlike Asian fish sauces or the ever-popular Worcestershire sauce. Ancient writers said silphium resembled asafoetida, which imparts an onion-garlic-type flavour, but without the foul smell which makes asafoetida so unappealing.

The tantalising flavour of one of history's most famous lost delicacies may be waiting out there for us. Watch out for a new wave of wealthy silphium gourmets, plus herb hunters, smugglers and black marketeers.

Ghosts at the party

ALAN MURDIE celebrates the festive season with tales of spectres at the feast

On 26 December 1591 George Lee of North Aston in Oxfordshire invited the Revd. Giles, his local vicar, and some other gentlemen friends over for an evening of convivial conversation and card playing at his home. It appears his reasons were mixed; for the previous few months his property had been troubled by mysterious falls of stones. As they were about to deal the first hand, the Revd. Giles jokingly suggested the task ought to be given to "the first knave" in the hall, an allusion to the postulated ghost. This provocation did not go unanswered. Immediately a large stone flew from the hall and struck the minister on the shoulder, an event that "greatly amazed both him and the rest of the company". Hastily the vicar proposed putting the cards away and they began praying instead. A pamphlet was later issued commemorating these strange events. (See *The Rise of the English Poltergeist*, 2025, by Andrew Pickering.)

Nearly four centuries later, in 1965, two late arrivals at a Christmas Eve party at the old Court House at Shelsley Walsh, Worcestershire, were astonished at seeing a large grey shape silently careering over the lawn and appearing to plunge into the water-filled moat. Rushing to the spot they were left confounded in finding nothing beyond the dark, unruffled surface of the water. The whole episode occurred in complete silence. Local opinion was that they had witnessed a re-enactment of an ill-fated rescue attempt of a Lady Lightfoot once imprisoned at the house on account of her outspoken criticism of King Henry VIII and later murdered. Her relatives remained in ignorance of this, and mistakenly believing she remained still alive, tried to take advantage of the festive season to liberate her. They launched a surprise raid on Christmas Eve night, but, unfortunately, either the horses bolted or the coachman inadvertently steered their vehicle into the moat, causing the deaths of all.

These two stories, centuries apart, show how a party is a recurring element in the English ghost story. A celebration of life can interweave with manifestations by the departed for one reason or another. As Dennis Bardens put it: "A spine-chilling yarn goes well with holly and red-faced laughter and the dancing flames of a roaring log fire."

P L CHADWICK / CREATIVE COMMONS

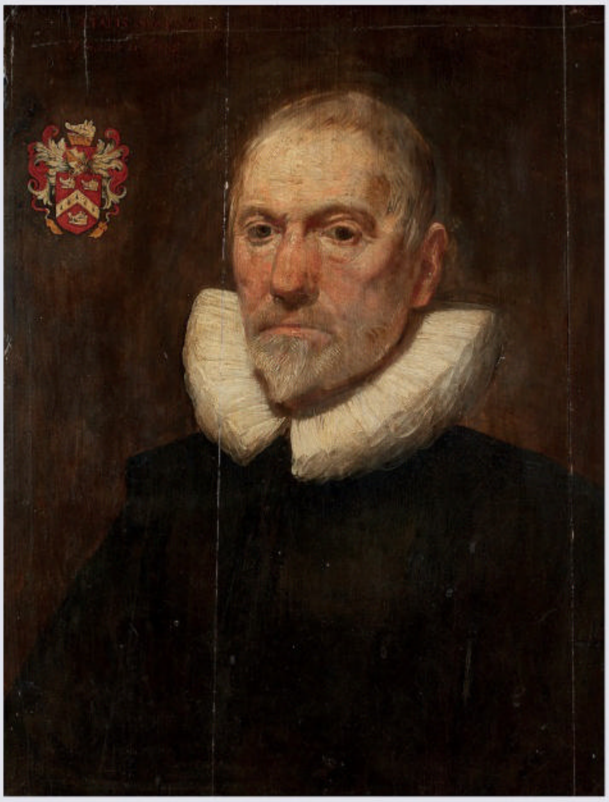
ABOVE: The old Court House at Shelsley Walsh, Worcestershire, where a Christmas Eve party was interrupted by an apparition.

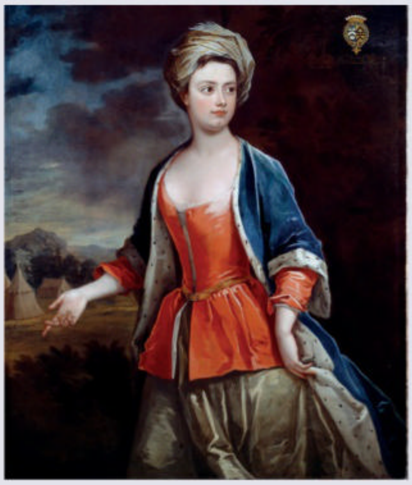
> The skulls always materialised again to persecute Philipson and his descendents

There are plenty of examples to choose from. A murderous conspiracy and land-grab was said to be behind the 17th century tale of a husband and wife named Kraster and Dorothy Cook of the old Calgarth Hall in Cumbria, who were victims of a wicked magistrate, Myles (or Miles) Philipson, who coveted their lands. He instigated a plot whereby the Cooks were framed for theft when attending a Christmas party to which Phillipson had invited them. Phillipson planted silver plate inside a pie presented to the Cooks as a goodbye gift and they unknowingly took this from the house. A great show of the goods being missing then played out, culminating in a search of the cottage occupied by the Cooks. Philipson accused them of theft, and the Cooks were put on trial. Now at this time, any accused person laboured under a major handicap at trial in being unable to give sworn evidence in their own defence (not amended until 1898). Inevitably, the Cooks were convicted and sentenced to death. On the scaffold at Appleby the condemned couple requested the chaplain in attendance to read out the 109th Psalm, or 'cursing' psalm' (see Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*), and Dorothy Cook pronounced a malediction upon Philipson and vowed revenge from beyond the grave.

And so it proved, for the following Christmas a ghastly phenomenon manifested at Calgarth Hall during another party. Two skulls materialised, believed to be those of Dorothy and Kraster Cook, occupying a position in the window of one room at the Hall, "as if to perpetuate the memory of such injustice, and as a memento of their innocence".

Despite steps taken to dispose of the skulls (including throwing them into Lake Windermere), they always materialised again to persecute Philipson and his descendants. Their wealth declined and their race became extinct. In 1788, one of the skulls was supposedly taken to London and did not return (where might it be now, one wonders?). In 1819, one was reportedly still there, "nearly mouldered away". (*Lays and Legends of the English Lake Country*, 1872, by John Pagen White).





LEFT: A portrait of wicked magistrate Myles Philipson, haunted by a pair of skulls. **BELOW LEFT**: Dorothy Walpole, said to haunt Raynham Hall as the 'Brown Lady'.

LYON & TURNBULL

The Brown Lady of Raynham Hall in Norfolk (**FT215:50-53, 415:20-21**) is another famous female ghost with a fondness for disturbing parties. She is believed to be Dorothy Walpole, sister of Sir Robert Walpole, who died in 1726. Tradition alleges she was murdered but she actually succumbed to smallpox. She was seen by a Colonel Loftus and a Mr Hawkins at one Christmas party that occurred somewhere between 1835 and 1840 (see Lucia C Stone in *Rifts in the Veil*, 1878). Her apparition was described as "a stately lady in her rich brocade, a sort of coif on her head, the features clearly defined, but where there should have been eyes, dark hollows". Another witness, again following another party, was the author Captain Marryat, who fired a pistol at her after she grinned diabolically at him. The pistol ball was later recovered from the wainscotting. With a tale like that in her family it was hardly surprising Marryat's daughter Florence turned to Spiritualism.

Expanding the theme of ghosts and party celebrations are stories of travellers in unfamiliar areas who call at a house asking for directions and find a party is apparently in full swing. Usually there is some interaction before the traveller leaves. Later it is discovered the house is long abandoned or has even vanished completely and the figures seen were ghosts.

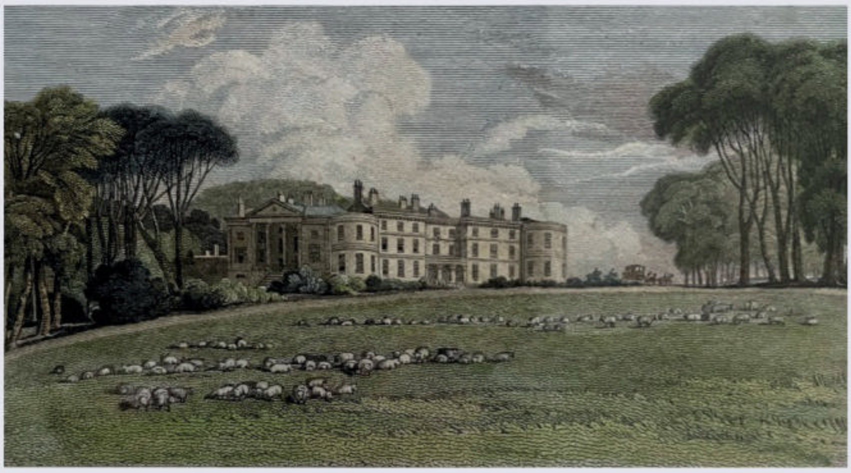
One Christmas Eve between 1820 and 1830 two boys were being transported through snowy countryside in a coach when their coachman took a wrong turning at some crossroads and became lost. Seeing a brilliantly lit-up house where a party seemed to be taking place, the elder of the two young gentlemen walked over and knocked on the door, and asked directions from the master of the house, who came out to meet him. The boy was invited to enter, but upon him declining, a male servant was sent out to guide them back to the right road. Just before the coach departed, one of the boys gave the servant a half-crown tip. But as he placed the coin in the servant's hand, it appeared to fall through the hand into the snow, and the man mysteriously vanished.

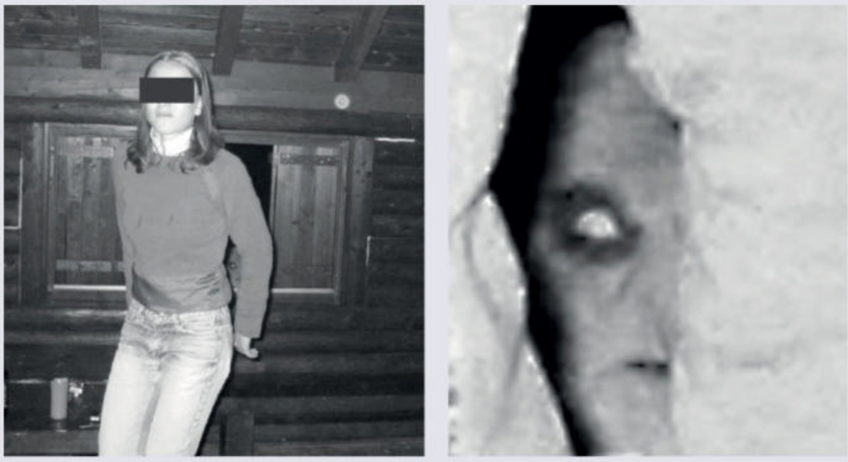
On reaching their destination, the young travellers learnt no such mansion now stood in the locality. Apparently, such a house once formerly occupied the spot but was pulled down after a terrible crime was committed one Christmas Eve years before. The next day the boys returned to the scene, finding only the wheel marks of their carriage and a half-crown piece lying in the snow. In 1882 members of the newly formed Society for Psychical Research traced the surviving traveller, by then in advancing years. He could only confirm part of the story and there were crucial differences, not least that the discovery that the house no longer existed was only made years after and that the detail of the coin falling through the hand of the servant was just a misremembered joke.

Folklorists are apt to doubt the authenticity of such stories, viewing them as modern variants of older legends and such accounts have circulated since. For example, in a later version, set at Cold Ashton, Gloucestershire, in the 1930s, involving a painter named Olive Snell, the tip was handed to the servant on the doorstep. When she returned, the coin was found lying outside a derelict mansion. In 1993, I heard a garbled version involving the Grenadier Pub in Knightsbridge and a lost modern cab driver and a supposedly phantom barman giving directions at a time the pub was supposedly closed for refurbishments.

Sources: "First Report of the Committee on Haunted Houses" in *Proceedings of the SPR* Vol. 1, 1882-83, 103-105; *Ghosts* (1970) by Eric Russell; *Haunted Britain* (1973) by Anthony Hippisley Coxe; *The Lore of the Land* (2006) by Jacqueline Simpson and Jennifer Westwood.

Partying itself may leave ghostly echoes where tragedies occur or the hi-jinks spill over into immoral and wayward behaviour. The classic example of a party gone wrong is the Mistletoe Bough legend where it is either a Christmas party or a bridal party following a wedding. During a game of hide and seek, a young woman fatally conceals herself in a trunk, which locks from the inside and suffocates her. Despite searches by her anxious friends she is never found. Her disappearance remains a mystery, but is woefully recalled each subsequent Christmas by the blighted household. Eventually, the original family die out. Many years later, with new residents in place, an old, locked trunk is discovered, which on being forced open is found to contain the skeleton of a woman in party clothes. The discovery explains the strange noises heard annually around Christmas time; the problem for the legend is that it is so widespread that identical incidents would have to occur at multiple sites. But perhaps it happened once…





TOP: Quidenham, Norfolk, home to a phantom funeral procession. **ABOVE**: The photograph from a teenage party in Germany and a blow-up of the eerie face glimpsed in the crook of the girl's arm.

A more blatant fiction concerns the returning shades of profligate rakes in the 18th century who formed an 'Everlasting Club' at Jesus College, Cambridge. In life they vowed to hold drunken orgies for eternity, each 2 November. After their deaths, every year on that night the sounds of such proceedings echo from a room above a certain staircase in the college. Alas, this story is an invention by the college master Arthur Gray in 1919.

From Quidenham in the Norfolk Brecklands comes a ghost connected with an irreverent, indeed blasphemous, wake held for a member of the Holland family who owned the local manor. The building was acquired by John Holland, a local Member of Parliament in 1572 and either he or one of his sons is believed to have been the "godless and profligate Holland" who left directions that when he died his coffin was to be carried to the grave by 12 drunken men as the church clock struck midnight. His wishes were carried out, but when the funeral procession crossed the bridge close to the churchyard, the inebriated bearers, with the coffin, either fell or walked over the parapet into the river. Naturalist R Rainbird Clarke wrote in *Breckland Wilds* (1937) that "To this day the villagers maintain that on certain nights can still be heard the ghostly tramp of that unhallowed funeral train, moving along with shouting, laughter, and ribald songs till it reaches the river, then comes the loud splash as it falls headlong into the stream followed by the horrible curses and cries of the drowning men."

If the Holland family were involved in these unseemly proceedings, it would have occurred between 1572 and 1755 when the estate was acquired by a new owner, Lord Albermarle. Diverting the road and expanding the grounds, he turned it into a prestigious country estate, known for its hospitality and elite shooting parties, a hallmark of British aristocratic life before World War I. Possibly, the tradition expressed local community distaste and protest for such extravagances and indulgences.

Coming to the 21st century, a photographic case involving a phantom apparently showing up at a rural teenage party in Germany in July 2002 has received detailed study. The image taken at the party shows an eerie looking humanoid face gazing in through the window of a woodland cabin. The image was inadvertently captured on a digital camera and only noticed afterwards when the picture was uploaded to a private Internet site. The peculiar face appears at the window, which is further framed under the arm of a girl standing in the foreground. It remains something of a puzzle. Several attendees from the party complained of feelings of anxiety and fear after noticing the image.

Details are given in article "A Remarkable Photographic Anomaly and its Interpretation" (2014) by Gerhard A Mayer, published in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (Vol 78. No.914). His article summarises a report from an investigative team attached to the Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health (IGPP) at Freiburg. To ensure the picture had not been edited subsequently, digital and analogue experts examined it and concluded it was not faked. A reflection was excluded (the windows had no glass in them). Consequently, the exact nature of the 'extra' remains uncertain. Interviews revealed that prior to the photo being taken a suggestive atmosphere was created by two boys at the party playing at ghosts. However, the physiognomy of the mysterious 'face' did not resemble any guest at the party, whose locations were all known when the picture was taken. A natural explanation cannot be ruled out, but the picture is certainly very strange. Interestingly, German folklore contains references to spotting spirits through the crooked arm of a person. One possibility considered by the team was that the partygoers might have unknowingly created a paranormal phenomenon, perhaps some kind of thought form.

And why not? Nineteenth century Spiritualist gatherings in domestic homes often took the form of light-hearted table turning parties, a merry atmosphere being considered conducive to incubating manifestations. Many cultures through history have thought it appropriate to invite spirits and deceased loved ones back to join celebrations and parties. And, more disturbingly, there are many modern stories about homes becoming haunted after people have casually tried out the Ouija board as a party game.

Sources: *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973) by Andrew Green; *Ghosts and Hauntings* (1965) by Dennis Bardens.

CRAP CRIME CAPERS

Another round-up of hapless hoods and failed felons – has nobody ever told these people about CCTV?

DOUBLE JEOPARDY

Fleeing from police who had come to arrest him for failing to turn up at a prison in Oldenburg, Germany, a 32-year-old fugitive leapt from a balcony… straight onto a wasps' nest. Trying to dislodge the stinging insects and salve the pain, the man hurled himself into a nearby paddling pool, from which officers retrieved him, writhing in agony. *Metro, 15 Aug 2024.*

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS...

Following a report of a "suspicious person" lying outside the Affordable Cremation & Burial Service funeral home, Las Vegas police found a corpse face down on rocks at the front of the property, its feet covered with plastic bags. Further investigation revealed a smashed window and an empty coffin outside on a trolley. CCTV evidence led them to Patricia Sierra, 47, who admitted trying to steal the $2,600 casket and dumping the body it contained outside the undertaker's premises, although she explained she had a hazy recollection of events, having "blacked out from drinking six beers" before the attempted heist. *independent.co.uk, 5 Sept 2024.*

HANDLING STOLEN GOODS

Four thieves targeted the Crafty Egg café in Redfield, Bristol, hours after it closed. Rather than breaking in, the gang concentrated on carefully removing the café's four door handles. "They didn't cover their faces and took ages removing the handles despite having a power tool," said the puzzled owner. As the whole incident was captured on CCTV, police are confident they can apprehend the gang. *Metro, 17 Oct 2024.*

BEAR-FACED CHEEK

Four men from California, who alleged that a rampaging bear had done £112,272 of damage to several cars, including a Rolls Royce and two Mercedes, had their insurance claim rejected after the insurance department analysed the video they had submitted. "Upon further scrutiny of the video, the investigation determined the bear was actually a person in a bear costume," they concluded, and when police raided one of the claimants' homes, they found a bear suit, complete with metal claws used to inflict the "damage". As a result, the men were arrested on charges of insurance fraud and conspiracy. *D.Telegraph, 14 Nov 2024.*

LEFT: The not-so-crafty crims caught on camera outside a Bristol cafe. **BELOW LEFT**: Police in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, are seeking a convenience store raider in a Scooby-Doo suit.

She "blacked out from drinking six beers" before the attempted heist

GOTCHA!

A 24-year-old Korean man, up in court for committing a serious sexual assault, thought he was in the clear when crucial CCTV footage failed to show him committing the crime. His hopes were dashed, though, when closer scrutiny showed that his actions had, in fact, been reflected in the glass door of a washing machine and captured by the camera, earning him an eight year prison sentence. *BBC News, 24 March 2025.*

X-RAYED OFFENDER

After a thief snatched a pair of Tiffany & Co. diamond earrings worth nearly $770,000 from an upmarket jewellers in Orlando, Florida, he fled by car, but was pulled over by state troopers on a Florida Panhandle highway. However, before officers reached his vehicle, the thief swallowed the jewellery. This did not deter the police, who had him X-rayed and identified the stolen items in his digestive tract. "These foreign objects are suspected to be the earrings taken in the robbery but will need to be collected… after they are passed," said the arrest report. The 32-year-old thief said: "I should have thrown them out the window." *editions.cnn.com, 6 Mar 2025.*

DEMON WOLF

New Orleans police were surprised to find that security camera footage of a break-in at a shop on Chef Menteur Highway showed what appeared to be a 6ft-5 (1.95m) "werewolf" running riot in the shop. "He used a crowbar to break into the cash registers and took cash," police said, "he also took merchandise, which he carried away in black plastic bags, before fleeing toward Stemway Drive and then unknown". Footage from the back of the shop though, showed the culprit before he put on his wolf mask, allowing him to be identified as Keddrick Demon Jones Jr., 19, who police are now seeking. *aol.com, 17 Apr 2025.*

SCOOBY-DON'T

Police in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, circulated CCTV footage of a man raiding a convenience store in Duncanville while wearing a full Scooby-Doo costume. In their Facebook appeal for information, they said that the criminal made off with cash and change "but no snacks" and asked "anyone who can help us unmask this villain" to call the police number. Predictably, a commenter said "When he gets caught and his mask is taken off he's gonna say 'if it weren't for you and those meddling kids'." *D.Mirror, 28 Jun 2025.*

ALIEN ZOO NEWS FROM THE CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL GARDEN

KARL SHUKER shares some first-hand accounts of giant scorpions scuttling around Florida

Over the decades I've received a great many reports concerning alleged giant spiders: but spiders are not the only arachnids with possible cryptozoological connections. Also on record, yet far fewer in number, are sightings of what have been described as giant scorpions, and as the following example is not only hitherto unpublished but also the most detailed that I've ever encountered, I am devoting this entire column to it.

GIANT SCORPIONS IN FLORIDA?

North America's largest known native species of scorpion is the desert hairy scorpion *Hadrurus arizonensis*, indigenous to the deserts of the southwestern USA as well as Utah and Nevada, which can attain a total length of up to 5.5in (14cm). Imagine my surprise, therefore, when on 9 November 2025 I received a fascinating email from Richard 'Rick' Stross, containing two first-hand eyewitness accounts by him of seeing apparent giant scorpions in Florida that he estimates at being almost twice as big as *H. arizonensis*. Here they are:

In the 1980s I was the hazardous waste specialist for the South Florida District of the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation (it is now called the Florida Department of Environmental Protection). I saw the scorpions on a routine inspection of the waste at the Highlands Leather Factory in the industrial park at the Sebring Airport in Sebring, Highlands County, Florida.

While verifying that the labels on the containers of chromium waste were properly filled out, I caught a glimpse of one as it scurried across the floor. At first glance it appeared to be a scorpion about one foot [30 cm] long. Since scorpions don't get that big, I assumed that my eyes were playing tricks on me and I actually saw a rat. When I told the owner that I saw a rat but I would have sworn that it looked like a scorpion, he smiled and took me to an office to show me a captive specimen in a one-gallon glass jar. The captive scorpion was fully as long as the jar that contained it. Gallon glass jars are usually about 10 inches [25cm] long, and that is my estimate for the length of the captive scorpion.

The factory owner told me that the giant scorpions are seen occasionally on the Sebring Airport, especially in and around the leather factory. A man who was stung said the sting is extremely painful, but not serious, and he did not require medical attention. A scientist who knew about insects said these scorpions remind him of scorpions from the Caribbean islands. All information in this paragraph is from the factory owner; I did not personally meet the stung man or the scientist.

LEFT: Could what Rick saw have been the emperor scorpion, *Pandinus imperator*?

Rick concluded his account by mentioning that Highlands Leather Company received hides from around the world, so if the scorpions had entered Florida as accidental stowaways in one such shipment, they could have originated anywhere.

It occurred to me that American cryptozoologist Chad Arment, who has a particular interest in reports of mysterious American invertebrates, might have learnt of similar instances, so with Rick's permission I forwarded his email to Chad and received this reply:

A few possibilities come to mind. a) It was a vinegaroon [aka tailed whip scorpion], slightly exaggerated in length. iNaturalist does show vinegaroons reported in Highlands Co., FL. b) Years ago, someone emailed me about seeing emperor scorpions in southern Florida. He thought someone from the pet trade had released them for easy re-capture and sale after they established a breeding colony. He wouldn't tell me where exactly, as it was part of his skunk ape research site. I would guess the memory of length was mistaken, whatever it was...

Chad also alluded to the scorpion genus Centruroides, which is represented by several North American species, the largest being *C. sculpturatus*, the Arizona bark scorpion, up to 3.1in (8cm) long and, unlike *H. arizonensis*, sporting a very venomous sting. Moreover, they are pests in the Caribbean. As for vinegaroons: occurring throughout the USA, including Florida and even Alaska, these superficially scorpion-like but taxonomically discrete arachnids do not exceed 3.3in (8.5cm) long, with most species having a body length little more than an inch. Conversely, the emperor scorpion *Pandinus imperator*, a true scorpion, has an average adult length of 8in (20cm), but this species is not native to the USA, inhabiting the rainforests and savannahs of West Africa. Yet because of its very impressive appearance, it is popularly maintained as an exotic pet worldwide. Also, despite its stature, its sting rarely affects humans severely. So, might Richard's mega-scorpions have been escapee/released emperors?

After forwarding Chad's comments to Rick, I received his response, containing these additional details:

The first scorpion I saw was moving and I only had a glimpse of it. Therefore my estimate that it was about a foot long may be exaggerated. Maybe it was only as long as the second scorpion... the one in the jar. It was still much bigger than any other scorpion I had ever seen, either in Florida or in South America.

The second scorpion was in a jar and I could observe it better. It was bigger than any scorpion I had seen except possibly the one I saw earlier in the leather factory. My guess of 10 inches long is because it was as long as the jar. I looked up the size of gallon jars when I sent my first email and found them to usually be about 10 inches long. It's possible that my memory is exaggerated and the scorpion was slightly smaller... Perhaps it was closer to eight or nine inches. It was definitely huge for a scorpion, which is why the factory owner kept it in a jar to display. I had seen a vinigaroon before, and I am sure that the specimen in the jar was a scorpion.

Even at the most conservative size estimate offered by Rick, these two scorpions were at least as large as the imperial scorpion, and if they really were roughly a foot long they far exceeded it. Moreover, the world's largest known scorpion, the giant forest scorpion *Heterometrus swammerdami*, native to India and Sri Lanka, and again a popular species in the pet trade due to its imposing appearance, 'only' measures up to 9in (23cm), thereby matching but not surpassing the lower size estimate offered by Rick for the scorpions he saw.

So what, taxonomically, *did* Rick see? With more than four decades having passed since his sightings, there seems little hope that the bottled specimen was preserved, but might there still be reports of living specimens scuttling around in that area? If any *FT* readers can add any further details, please let us know! My grateful thanks to Rick and Chad for kindly sharing their information and thoughts with me.

Richard 'Rick' Stross, pers. comm., 9 Nov 2025, 1 Dec 2025; Chad Arment, pers. comm., 10 Nov 2025.

LOST AND FOUND DEPARTMENT

Vintage snack wrappers, ancient ale and other itinerant objects

LIBRARY SNACK

During renovations to Cambridge University Library, workers dismantling shelves discovered the wrapper from a Crunchie bar that had been hidden for more than 50 years, with some crumbs still inside. The bright orange wrapper dated from the days when Crunchie, a chocolate-covered honeycomb bar, was made by Fry's, rather than Cadburys, and had the pre-decimalisation price of 6d printed on it. This means that it was manufactured before 1971, when Britain went over to the decimal currency. Lizzie Woodman, the library's social media co-ordinator, said, "Sometimes we find fascinating reminders left behind by past members of the library," and explained that "The wrapper had been stashed behind some books and then fallen down the back of the shelves so it was trapped under the bookshelf, and, as the library has millions of books and more than 205km (127 miles) of bookshelves, it could stay hidden for over 50 years." *BBC News, 11 Feb 2025.*

PHOTO RETURN

In Michigan, while checking through a book donated to the Sterling Heights Public Library's *Used, But Sterling* second-hand bookshop, a volunteer found a 1950s wedding photo. It was labelled "Frank and Josephine Ruggirello, Nana-Nono", which enabled the library to put out an appeal on social media to see if it could be reunited with the Ruggirellos. The post eventually reached Sarah Ruggirello, who said: "One of my childhood friends who I haven't spoken to in years tagged me in this post. She recognised my last name in it and said, 'Hey, are these some family members of yours?'" Ruggirello contacted the library to confirm that the photo came from the wedding of her late grandparents, Frank and Josephine, which took place on 26 September 1953, enabling them to return the photo. "My dad and I have never seen this exact photo before. We didn't know this exact photo existed," Ruggirello said. "I think now I'm going to frame it and display it somewhere in my house just because this was such a cool story and such a cool thing that happened." *[UPI] 10 Jun 2025.*

SARAH RUGGIRELLO

FRY'S
Crunchie
BIGGER
6d

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY / FACEBOOK

LEFT: The Ruggirellos' long-lost wedding photo from the 1950s. **BELOW LEFT**: The 50-year-old Crunchie wrapper found in Cambridge University Library. **BOTTOM RIGHT**: Dougal Gunn Sharp with an 1875 bottle of Allsopp's Arctic Ale.

STRAYING SPOON

Eighty-three years after it went astray, a silver spoon was returned to the Queens Hotel in Southsea, near Portsmouth. The spoon had the hotel's monogram on it, which is what allowed John White to send it back after finding it during a clear-out at his home in Bundanoon, New South Wales, Australia. John's mother Pamela and father Dudley both served in the Navy during WWII; when they had shore leave together they stayed at the Queens Hotel, and it was during one of these visits that they took the spoon. Pamela died in the 1980s, and the spoon was among her possessions that White took home to Australia, where it sat forgotten in his cutlery drawer until recently. "We thought it would be a nice gesture if we could send it back to the hotel and apologise for having it for so long and hope they hadn't missed it too much," said White. When the current manager of the Queens Hotel, Paul Playford, received the spoon, he said there were no hard feelings, adding: "We have a little curiosity cabinet, so it's going to live there along with the letter." *BBC News, 24 Jul 2025.*

A STIFF DRINK

A bottle of Allsopp's Arctic Ale, part of a small batch unearthed in a Shropshire garage a decade ago, was bought at auction by Dougal Gunn Sharp, founder of Edinburgh's Innis & Gunn brewery, for £3,000. Brewed at Queen Victoria's request for George Nares' expedition that attempted to reach the North Pole in 1875, the beer was fine-tuned for Arctic conditions. It has six times the calories of a regular beer and a potent alcohol content of nine per cent ABV, which made it so sweet and alcoholic it would not freeze, even at temperatures of -40C (-40F), and was more of a survival food than a recreational treat. The original records from Allsopps describe the brew as "strong and nutritive" and so gooey it had to be scooped out of the brewing coppers with buckets, rather than poured. Gunn Sharp intends to open the bottle and use it to "seed" a new batch of the formidable concoction, which Innis & Gunn will sell as a limited edition. "Some people might think it's madness to open it, but I think the real madness would be to leave it sitting on a shelf," said Gunn Sharp, adding: "Beer is meant to be shared, particularly on this, its 150th anniversary." *dailymail.co.uk, 3 Nov 2025.*

STUDENT ERROR

After spending six weeks at a summer school hosted by Gonville and Caius College in 1985, Carla Risoldi returned to the USA, but hurrying to catch her flight, she forgot to hand in her key. Forty years later, she rediscovered the key and took it back to the college on a visit to the UK, despite the possibility that she might owe the college over £20,000 in accrued late fines; there had been an initial fine of £10, then interest of £10 for every week the key was late after that. The college, though, said, "The fine was waived on this occasion and Carla, having returned the obsolete key, was presented with it as a memento of a glorious, formative summer." *BBC News, 22 Sept 2025.*

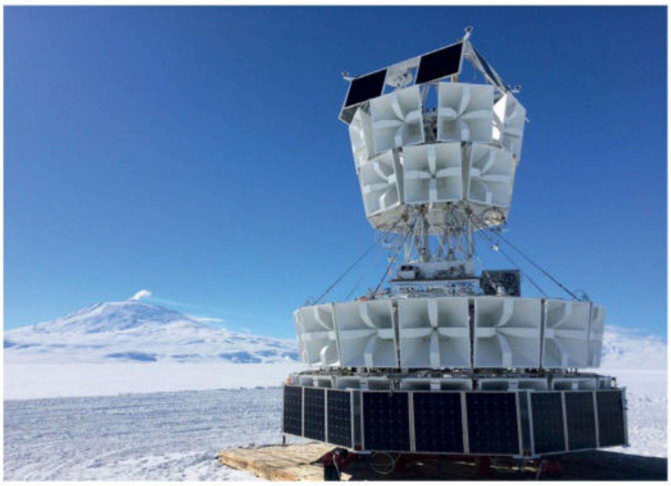
INNIS & GUNNN

PLANETARY PECULIARITIES

Anomalous signals from beneath Antarctica and other mysteries

ELDER THINGS?

Researchers in Antarctica using a detector called the Antarctic Impulsive Transient Antenna (ANITA) have discovered mysterious radio waves that seem to originate from beneath the ice. ANITA is designed to detect radio waves generated by cosmic rays from space hitting the atmosphere, and is flown on balloons over Antarctica, a location chosen because it is supposed to be free from radio interference from other sources. However, while searching for neutrinos in cosmic rays, ANITA discovered radio waves coming from below the balloon, rather than from above. "The radio waves that we detected were at really steep angles, like 30 degrees below the surface of the ice," said Stephanie Wissel, one of the ANITA team. While the radio waves still had the characteristics expected of those generated by neutrinos, they should not have been detectable emerging from the ice, as they would have had to have passed through thousands of kilometres of rock which should have absorbed them. As a result, Wissel says they have no idea how these signals came to be emerging from the ice, as this should be physically impossible. *foxnews.com, 14 Jun 2025.*



ABOVE: The aftremath of the landslide that caused the Dickson Fjord tsunami. **LEFT**: ANITA, deployed in Antarctica, has picked up signals coming from beneath the ice.

WIETER BOONE / DANISH MILITARY

CHRISTIAN MIKI / UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA

SHAKING FJORDS

Geologists worldwide were baffled by a series of bizarre earth tremors that were recorded taking place every 90 seconds over two periods in September and October 2023. Now, Thomas Monahan and his team from the University of Oxford have tracked down the culprits. They used sensitive satellite data that measures the height of the Earth's surface to discover that the tremors were caused by two mega tsunamis that got trapped in the remote Dickson Fjord in eastern Greenland.

The tsunami resulted from two massive landslides, triggered by the melting of an adjacent glacier, that crashed into the fjord. The shape of the fjord, though, meant that rather than surging out into the sea, the tsunamis became trapped standing waves that sloshed back and forth across the fjord like water in a bath. The force of these waves striking one, then the other, side of the fjord with a period of 90 seconds was strong enough to trigger earth tremors that could be detected by seismographs across the planet. *BBC News, 7 Jun 2025.*

> *They discovered radio waves coming from below the balloon*

MEGA MEGA WAVES

While it has long been known that under the right conditions the sea can generate anomalously huge waves that can engulf even the largest of ships, such as the 25.6m (84ft) Draupner Wave measured in the North Sea in 1995, researchers have now found they can become even more vast than was once thought. Previously, scientists have examined wave formation in 2D, but now a team including Dr Samuel Draycott from the University of Manchester and Dr Mark McAllister from the University of Oxford have extended wave modelling into three dimensions, finding that waves meeting each other from different directions can reach heights four times greater than previously thought possible. They have also found that while conventional waves dissipate after breaking, these waves can continue to grow even after breaking has occurred.

The largest and most dangerous waves form where wave systems meet, or where winds suddenly change direction, such as during a hurricane. The more spread out the directions from which these waves come, the larger the resulting wave. The team's findings could have a significant effect on the design of offshore structures such as wind turbines, and on our understanding of how various ocean processes work. *manchester.ac.uk, 18 Sept 2024.*

CORE BLIMEY!

Research into the structure of the Earth's core has revealed that it is undergoing surprising changes over a far shorter timescale than was previously imagined to be possible. The planet has a dense inner core 3,000 miles (4,828km) beneath the surface, surrounded by the molten outer core, and this rotates independently of the planet's daily rotation. It has been known for some time that there are long-term changes taking place in the inner core, but scientists had concentrated on looking at its rotation, which is slowing down.

However, by examining records of earthquakes going back decades, they found clear evidence that there was more going on down there. Looking at seismograph traces from 121 repeating earthquakes from 42 locations near Antarctica's South Sandwich Islands, they found one set that seemed very strange and suggested that the inner core is not a solid sphere as was once thought. It indicates that the inner core is undergoing "viscous deformation" where it changes shape through interacting with the outer core, so cannot be completely solid. "What we're observing in this study for the first time is likely the outer core disturbing the inner core," said John Vidale from the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, lead researcher on the project.

Unlike other changes detected in the core, which take place over decades or centuries, these changes are occurring over just a few years, leading Vidale to say: "The molten outer core is widely known to be turbulent, but its turbulence had not previously been observed to disrupt its neighbour the inner core on a human timescale." *independent.co.uk, 10 Feb 2025.*

MAGNETIC MYSTERY

For more than a century, a massive dip in the Earth's magnetic field over the South Atlantic, known as the South Atlantic Anomaly, has puzzled scientists. Now, satellite data has shown that it has grown rapidly over the last 11 years, expanding by an area equivalent to half the size of continental Europe, and is behaving in all kinds of unexpected ways. It is thought that a swirling body of molten iron in the Earth's outer core could be causing the anomaly, but what is happening is complex. "It's changing differently towards Africa than it is near South America. There's something special happening in this region that is causing the field to weaken in a more intense way," said Chris Finlay from the Technical University of Denmark. "Normally we'd expect to see magnetic field lines coming out of the core in the southern hemisphere, but beneath the South Atlantic Anomaly we see unexpected areas where the magnetic field, instead of coming out of the core, goes back into the core." Finlay's team have also found that the magnetic field is strengthening over Siberia, while weakening over Canada, which may be a result of the northern magnetic pole wandering towards Siberia over the last few years. *futurism.com, 19 Oct 2025.*

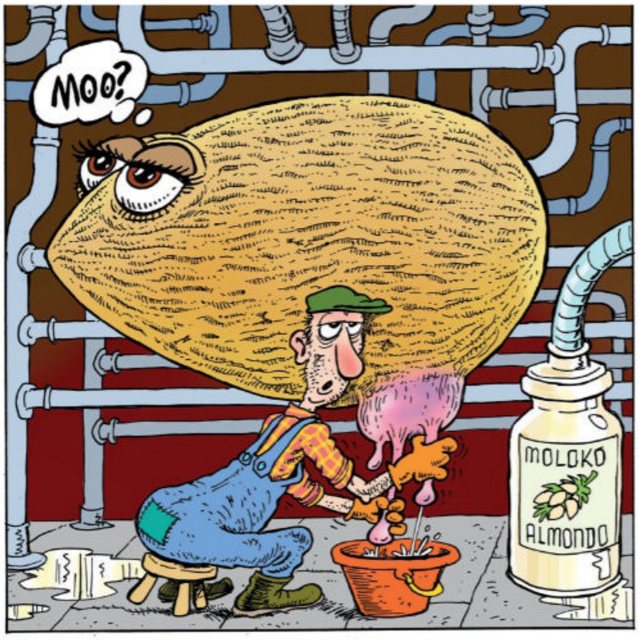
LUMPY WATER

While it might seem obvious that the surface of the oceans covering 70 per cent of the Earth's surface is level, this is not the case. The height of the ocean surface is affected by the mass of the solid planet underneath, which is not spread evenly, resulting in differences in gravity over the planetary surface. Where gravity is strong, the ocean level is higher than where it is weak, and sometimes the height difference is considerable. The most extreme example of this is the Indian Ocean Geoid Low (IOGL); this stretches across 1.2 million square miles (3.1m km^2) where the ocean surface is 106m (348ft) lower than nearby areas. What causes this has remained a mystery since it was discovered in 1948. Normally, such lows are caused by plumes of low-density hot lava rising towards the surface from the mantle near the Earth's core, but there has been no mantle plume detected beneath the Indian Ocean low. Now, Professor Attreyee Ghosh, a geophysicist at the Indian Institute of Science, has found the culprit. "The existence of the Indian Ocean Geoid Low is one of the most outstanding problems in Earth Sciences," she explained. "It is the lowest geoid/gravity anomaly on Earth and so far no consensus existed regarding its source." Using seismic data and computer simulations, Ghosh has found that hot, less dense material rising further west, towards Africa, is getting diverted east by the fast motion of the tectonic plate on which India sits, lowering the density of the deep geology under the anomaly, and causing gravity to weaken. "We believe the overall reason for this low is quite clear," she said. *thebrighterside.news, 19 Jul 2025.*

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

298: ALMOND MILK



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Almond milk is a recent invention.

The "truth"

Never tasted the stuff myself, but no doubt it's delicious. Or disgusting. Either way, it is bizarrely controversial. To triggered reactionaries it epitomises all that's awful in the world today: woke, trendy, vegan, worthy, new-fangled. The EU, with its unfailingly perfect grasp of world priorities, has banned almond milk from being marketed as a milk, although that word has always been used for both plant and animal juice. To those of us who are neither top-knotted hipsters nor puce-faced whiners, this anger seems rather odd. Perhaps if we can put almond milk in its historical context, that might help to defuse tempers a bit. Or, failing that, at least make them worse. For hundreds of years almond milk was one of English cuisine's staple ingredients and stars in every surviving Middle Ages cookbook. Many mediæval people would have consumed more almond milk than they did cow milk. Pre-Reformation Christianity designated more than half the days of the year as fast days, when dairy products were forbidden to the faithful; almonds helped fill the gap. Besides, because almonds were imported, and "milking" them was labour-intensive, it was a food for the rich and therefore considered superior to dairy milk. Almond milk died out, along with most Christian fasting, in the 17th century. Even recipes which had always used almond started using dairy. Cow's milk as a drink only became popular in the 19th century; in other words, cow milk became a substitute for traditional almond milk!

Sources

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Mythchaser

His mum "used to freak out", says a reader, when he picked up bird feathers from the ground, because they were "full of parasites". So did mine: were they right?

NECROLOG

We bid farewell to 'Britain's Oldest Witch' as she heads for the great coven in the sky and mourn the loss of a researcher who applied science to Bigfoot studies...

TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LEFT: Patricia Crowther and friend. **ABOVE:** Dr Jeff Meldrum.

PATRICIA CROWTHER

By the time of her death, aged 97, Patricia Crowther had become known as "Britain's Oldest Witch", with roots that went back to the early days of Wicca, the religion she was instrumental in popularising and shaping. Crowther was born in Sheffield, as Patricia Dawson, to a family steeped in clairvoyance and local folk traditions, and her psychic abilities were evident from an early age, when, she claimed, she would regularly communicate with fairies, who shared secrets not meant for most humans. Crowther went on to pursue a career as a professional entertainer and dancer working in theatre, including performing a puppet and magic show for children; it was this that led her to Wicca.

After a prediction from a fortune teller that she would meet her husband "over water", in 1956 she met Arthur Crowther, a stage magician and ventriloquist, on a plane flying over the Solent, en route to a show in which they were both performing. Bonding over a shared love of the occult, they swiftly became a couple, eventually marrying in a Wiccan ceremony in 1960.

When they met, Arthur was already involved in Wicca, and was close friends with its founder, Gerald Gardner, to whom he introduced Patricia. They hit it off immediately, and Patricia swiftly became first Gardner's apprentice, then his High Priestess, as he'd recently fallen out with the previous one, Doreen Valiente, over whether the craft should be publicised or remain just for true seekers. Crowther had no such qualms, and after being initiated into Gardner's Bricket Wood Coven, taking the name Thelema, she became a leading promoter of Wicca, making many media appearances, which benefitted from her stage experience, and writing numerous books on the craft, initially with Arthur, then, after his death in 1974, with other co-authors.

However, the aspect of Crowther's work that probably had the greatest impact on the public profile of Wicca was a radio series she and Arthur made for BBC Radio Sheffield in the early 1970s, called *A Spell of Witchcraft*. This looked at the history and folklore of witchcraft in Britain, and gave an insight into the beliefs, activities and practices of the local coven, run by Crowther, which became the basis for what is now known as the Sheffield line of Gardnerian Wicca. The series is credited as being instrumental in bringing Wicca to a wider audience and helping it achieve the prominence it enjoys today.

After Gardner's death, Crowther was increasingly influential within Wicca, spending almost seven decades at its heart, becoming a respected teacher and elder whose influence extended far beyond her coven. Along with Doreen Valiente, Lois Bourne, and Eleanor Bone, Crowther was one of the "early mothers" of modern Wicca, and with her passing one of the last living connections with the craft's origins and founder is gone. Announcing Crowther's death, the pagan journal *Wild Hunt* said: "As high priestess, author, and teacher, Patricia Crowther leaves a profound legacy. Her work ensured that witchcraft remained vibrant, accessible, and present in modern times. Her memory will be a blessing to all who have been touched by her work in Wicca, and her spirit continues to live on in the covens and communities she inspired."

Patricia Crowther, High Priestess and promoter of Wicca, born 14 Oct 1927, Sheffield, South Yorkshire; died 24 Sept 2025, Sheffield, aged 97.

JEFF MELDRUM

After the death of Grover Krantz, Dr Jeff Meldrum, who has died aged 67 from brain cancer, became the leading scientific voice in the Bigfoot community. Born to a devout Mormon family in Salt Lake City, Utah, Meldrum remained an active member of the Church of Latter Day Saints throughout his life, and from an early age took an energetic interest in the natural world, keeping a menagerie of animals and reading everything he could on the subject. He came to Bigfooting early, writing his first paper on the cryptid at 17, before going to Brigham Young University to study zoology, obtaining first a bachelor's degree and then a master's there, followed by a PhD at State University of New York, Stoneybrook. On graduating, Meldrum took posts as a visiting assistant professor at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina, and as Assistant Professor at Northwestern University Medical School before settling in Pocatello, Idaho, as Professor of Anatomy and Anthropology at Idaho State University, where he remained for the rest of his life.

It was after he moved to Idaho that Meldrum's Bigfoot interests took on a greater prominence, as he brought his expertise in bipedal locomotion to bear on evidence collected by Bigfoot hunters in the field. He took a forensic approach to analysing this material, mainly footprint casts, and he was able to identify aspects that would have been imperceptible to anyone not trained in forensic anthropology. Meldrum could discern things like dermal ridges and locked joints that non-specialists would have been oblivious to, indicating that the footprints must have been made by a living creature and not fabricated by a lay hoaxer. This did not always sit well with Meldrum's academic colleagues, but, he said, "There was actually this little moment where this angel sits on my shoulder and says, 'Do you really want to go down this path?' and the devil on the other shoulder says, 'How could you not?'" Meldrum decided that he was of the Devil's party. He wrote several influential books that took a sober and academic look at the evidence for Bigfoot, the best known of which is *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science* (2006), and was a frequent guest on TV shows and podcasts explaining the scientific evidence for Bigfoot and its relatives. Despite the controversy, Meldrum was well liked by everyone, even those who disagreed with his conclusions. Speaking after Meldrum's death, *Offroad X-Files* podcast host Jimmy Toungate said. "What everybody felt about this great man is he was kind, generous, respectful, adored by so many and was a huge loss. But we'll continue on."

Don Jeffrey Meldrum, anthropologist and Bigfoot researcher, born, Salt Lake City, Utah, 24 May 1958; died Pocatello, Idaho, 9 Sept 2025, aged 67.

FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

MATERIALISATIONS

Consider a 1929 description of a ghost from Cheshire: the "spirit was… like a kind of illuminated mist, which gradually grew into the shape of the head and shoulders of a woman". This is how I would imagine a ghost appearing: an uncertain form taking on a recognisable form.

But the phantom trick described above – let's call it 'materialisation' – is surprisingly recent. In fact, there are almost no accounts from before c. 1850. In the same way that fairies with wings or (alien) greys are developments in how we imagine supernatural beings, materialising ghosts are relatively new.

> "A GHOST MUST BE THE SEMBLANCE OF SOME DEPARTED HUMAN FORM, BUT INDISTINCT AND VAGUE"

Now here we must acknowledge that there has long been the idea that the spirits of the dead (unless, zombie-like, they reanimate the body) are insubstantial. Way back in Homer, Odysseus reaches out to embrace the spirit of his mother, but his hands close on nothing, because spirits are, the Greeks believed, a vapour. But materialisation – that is, taking on a form – is not common prior to the mid-19th century. In fact, I can't even find that many references to ghosts passing through doors and walls prior to then: something that is *de rigueur* in the 20th century. If such translations happened before, they tend to be implied: in the 1900s, there is an excited description of the form coming out of something solid.

Materialisation seems to come, in part, from Spiritualism. There, in the 1860s, was the idea that a gifted medium could materialise a spirit and make it solid: ectoplasm was conceptualised to literally give substance to this idea. I wonder whether early Spiritualists were not inspired, in turn, by the increasing importance of magic lanterns in Britain from the early and particularly from the mid-1800s. In 1846 one British writer reports that to "be satisfactory, a ghost must be the semblance of some departed human form, but indistinct and vague, like the image of a magic lanthorn before you have got the right focus." This gives a strong sense of a new technology influencing how people were describing and perhaps seeing the supernatural.

If technology is not your thing, there is a possible traditional inspiration: shape-changing. Outdoor ghosts were frequently described, prior to the Great War, as taking on different forms: a cat, a horse, a headless bear, a rabbit, a fire, in crazy, madcap succession… Here, almost by definition, there was a constant materialisation and dematerialisation. Shape-changers also teach us to think of supernatural beings taking different forms. Now the shape-changer ghost disappeared c. 1900. But perhaps this potential to change forms, albeit only from mist to a human likeness, survived them?

Simon is the author of britishmythology.substack.com

Angels, aliens and anæsthesia

NIGEL WATSON finds links between angelic visitations, alien encounters and medical procedures

ASTRO ANGELS AGAIN

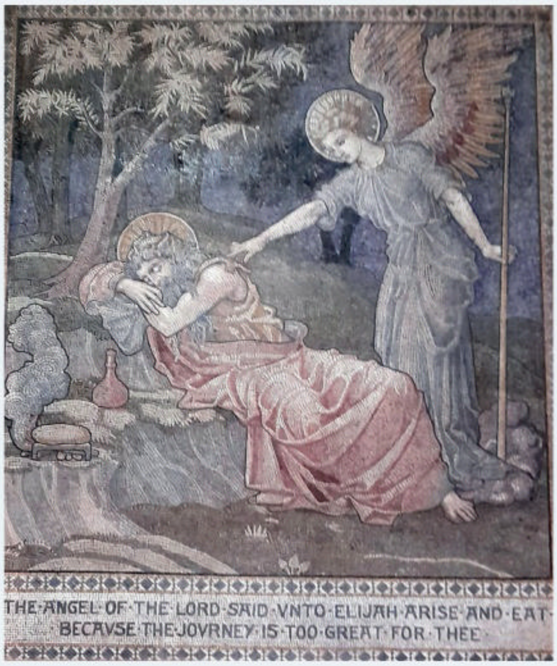
Since the publication of *Seeing Angels Instead* (**FT462:34-39**) I've come across several more instances of angels interfacing with our fortean world. In the very next issue (**FT463:42**) it is noted that Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi was involved in a car accident where he thought three angels had protected him. This brings to mind Charles Fort's rather risqué view of angels:

"The damned and the saved, and there's little to choose between them; and angels are beings that have not obviously barbed tails to them or never have such bad manners as to stroke an angel below the waist-line."

On holiday in Chester, with no bad manners in mind, I took a photograph of a wall mosaic entitled "Sleeping Elijah, or Elias (c.900BC-c.849BC), Prophet & Father of the Carmelites, & Angel" in Chester Cathedral.

Ancient astronaut fans often say, with reference to alien abductions, that an angel whisked Elijah away to "heaven". When he fled into the wilderness, to escape the wrath of Jezebel, according to the Bible, he beseeched the Lord to take his life. After falling asleep, he was awoken suddenly by an angel. It instructed him to get up and eat. He did as he was told, and then fell asleep again. The angel woke him up for a second time and told him to eat so that he would have the strength to continue his journey. It was much later on his trek that a chariot of fire and horses of fire, sans angel, appeared and lifted Elijah into heaven in a whirlwind. So we now connect the angel and whirlwind to fit in with our modern-day view of alien encounters.

Elizabethan John Dee through his assistant Edward Kelly had "conversations" with angels between 1583 and 1587. Only Kelly saw the archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Urial and Madimi, and he described them as varying from a tall creature, a young girl or a yellow haired old maid. They revealed their Enochian language and the angelic hierarchy, but Dee never discovered the universal knowledge he sought. Dee is buried in Mortlake Churchyard close to where the notoriously intellectual ufologist and *Magonia* editor John Rimmer used to live. David Childress, who is simply a notorious ufologist, in *Ancient Aliens* (Series 21, Episode 15) asserts that the angels Dee interacted with were aliens (ker-ching) who wanted the British Empire to spread across the world.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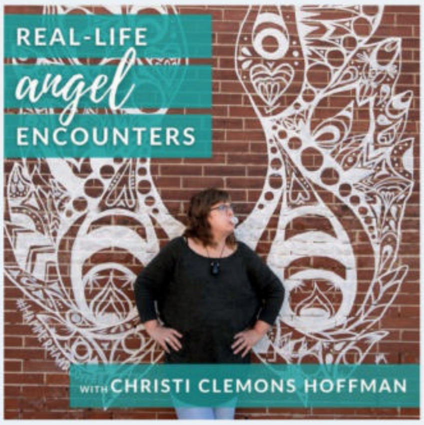
NIGEL WATSON

LEFT & BELOW: Angels ancient and modern: "Sleeping Elijah" is awoken by an angel in Chester Cathedral, while Christi Clemons-Hoffman relates contemporary angelic experiences in her books and podcasts.

> Next to this golden aura of archangel Michael, Stan saw a spindly-armed entity that also radiated a golden light



ET experiencer Stan Ho, in *UFO Encounters: Up Close and Personal* (ed. Jason Gleaves, Flying Disk Press, 2022) tells a modern-day story of his angelic/ET experience. Although sceptical, Stan had an Aura teaching session on 13 January 2007. As a preliminary, his teacher told him to stare at a red card against a white wall for three minutes. When the card was removed he had to look at the wall again, and due to the after-image on his retina he briefly saw a square green shadow where the red card had been. His teacher then stood against the wall and asked him what colour her aura was. On giving the correct answer, he was then asked to observe any changes as she channelled the archangel Michael. It only took five seconds for him to see her aura turn from a green to a blue and then a golden light that expanded to a height of nine feet (2.7m).

Next to this golden aura of archangel Michael, Stan saw a 3.5ft- (1m) tall, spindly-armed entity with a large egg-like head that also radiated a golden light. Stan was convinced this was a grey alien and the whole experience made him ponder if the religious figure and the alien are both embedded in the same dimension. If so, that would explain how his teacher was able to channel both at the same time.

The theme of angels/aliens as being of the light, is continued in Christi Clemons Hoffman's book *Real-Life Angel Encounters* (O-Books, 2025). She relates the experiences of "Mary" a resident of Buffalo, New York, whose mother had numerous meetings with beings when she was alone. When Mary was eight, her mother confessed to her that one night she saw two beings at the end of her bed, and at the same time she felt a warmth in her womb. During this encounter she was unable to move or call out to her husband, which sounds very much like an instance of sleep paralysis. Nonetheless, a few weeks later her mum found she was pregnant with Mary.

At the age of 10, Mary had an experience where she was lifted into a dark environment with sparkly lights and was given the message that "life is nothing." As an adult, Mary has undergone hypnotic regression where she saw the bedroom encounter through her mum's eyes; the two beings looked like classic aliens and told her they were of the light. Going back to her experience as a 10-year-old, in another regression session, she described going down an elevator where she met a bright being who looked feminine. It filled Mary with light and love, and a connection to this light source.

As Mary admits, these beings could be labelled angels, guides or aliens. They are so ambiguous that it opens the door to whatever fits best with our own belief systems. Vice President JD Vance is undecided: "Is it aliens or is it our guardian angel, or is it aliens or is it a not-so-guardian force that doesn't care about us, or in fact actively wishes us harm?"

If they ever prove to be technologically and/or spiritually advanced beings riding around in spaceships they would certainly produce a world-shattering ontological shock.

AVENGING ANGELS

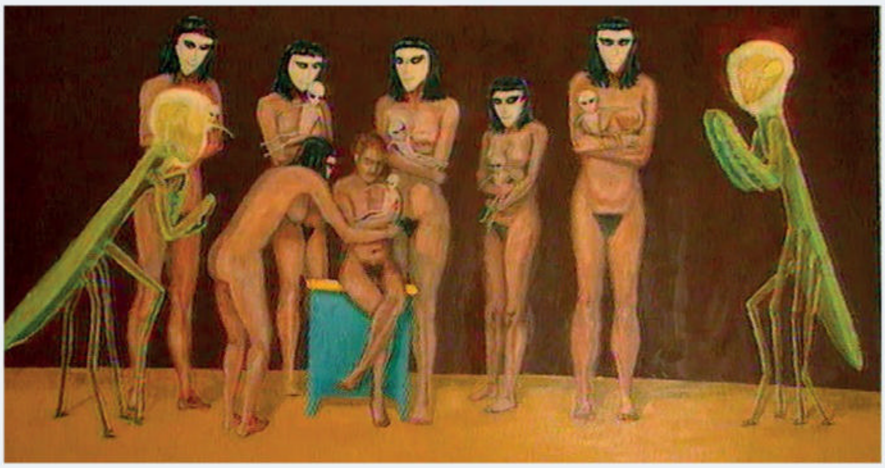
The concept of angelic aliens also comes up when we question whether abduction experiences are the product of medical traumas. It does sound convincing that people might mix up memories of being under surgery with memories (often recovered under hypnotic regression) of being examined inside a flying saucer by alien examiners.

In both instances, percipients are in a brightly lit room, where they find themselves lying down on an operating table. It is an extremely vulnerable situation where you do not know what is going on and "surgeons" look down on you and probe your body. As the percipient, you have no control or means of escape. Traumatic memories might be triggered instantly, or by life events many years later. People who have had awareness under anæsthesia report instances like this: "It struck again days later as horrifying images and terror that rose from the depths of my being. I was once again in the grips of horror, again not comprehending, again trapped, again struggling to survive, yet wishing for death."

The National Audit Project 5 (NAP5) in their report on "Accidental Awareness during General Anæsthesia in the UK and Ireland" noted that out of 400 respondents, about half suffered long-term psychological effects and could take many years to report the experience. Although the NAP5 report does not mention aliens, Columbia University psychoanalyst David V Forrest, in a paper entitled "Alien Abduction: A Medical Hypothesis", warned that "accidental awareness under general anæsthesia" could cause alien abduction experiences.

Often alien abduction examinations do seem rather pointless or extreme. At the height of the abduction frenzy it was alleged that people had implants shoved up their nasal passages or inside their skulls or feet. Another alien favourite was to insert needles into female abductees as some form of gynæcological examination, or to extract sperm from male abductees.

As an example, the abduction experience of Betty Andreasson, detailed under hypnotic regression, tells of being taken onboard a craft that had a sterile, acrid odour like hot metal mingled with disinfectant. After she had been placed on a platform inside a large chamber, a long metallic rod was inserted into her nasal cavity. She felt a blinding agonising pain as the probe seemed to enter the very centre of her brain. Another instrument pressed onto her naval felt like it was either withdrawing or implanting something inside her. As Raymond Fowler, a MUFON investigator, heard her tell this story he felt physically sick. He described this procedure as purposeful, clinical, and "utterly devoid of compassion".



ABOVE: In later abduction accounts the aliens seemed "more preoccupied with sex and the outcome of sex".

Nonetheless, Andreasson regarded her experiences from a Christian point of view, and thought "they must be angels, because Jesus was able to walk through doors and walls (sic) and walk on water. Must be angels… And Scriptures keep coming into my mind where it says, 'Entertain the stranger, for it may be angels unaware'."

Fowler was not sure how to respond, questioning whether "these entities (are) servants of God, as she believes? Or deceivers wearing holiness as a mask? My instincts as an investigator clash with my heart as a believer."

When looking at such cases, Marika Moisseef, in her paper "Extraterrestrial Pregnancies and Nasal Implants: A Mythologization of Biopower?", notes that "many elements in their stories lead me to believe that the events they evoke should be appreciated in the context of experiences that took place during very real surgical procedures, and, given the age of the individuals in question, the model may well be the removal of their tonsils and adenoids. Here we have an ENT [ear, nose and throat] concern that makes the connection with the motif of nasal implants."

In an important article by Dennis Stacy entitled "Alien Abortions, Avenging Angels" published in *Magonia* 44 (Oct 1992), he observes that at first abductions were a "relatively impersonal affair, much like a first time visit to the doctor or a general military draft physical. X-rays or full-body scans of a sort might be taken, along with tissue and body fluid samples." This changed as Budd Hopkins became more involved in abduction research, when, Stacy notes, "the medical exam becomes sexually-charged; skin scoops are still taken, which appear later as 'anomalous' scars, but in general the aliens seem more preoccupied with sex and the outcome of sex. Ova are forcibly extracted from female abductees, sperm from males. Extraterrestrial rape is not just bruited but explicitly stated. The bastard by-products are even later displayed to their unwilling mothers for reluctant inspection and nursing."

The Greys are considered by Stacey as "psychic projections, an imaginal caricature of a fœtus. Not only are they neutrally coloured, they are half-formed and sexless, lacking hair and obvious genitalia, possessing only a vestigial mouth, nose and ears. In fact the Greys consist mainly of, or are perceived as, a pair of large, dark, unwavering eyes, with all that analogy entails in terms of God and cosmic guilt. Indeed, they are the very embodiment of guilt, literally and figuratively. In reality, they are avenging angels."

His controversial assessment is that "the abduction experience is a played-out drama which reverses the roles of victim (the unborn fœtus) and victimizer (the original abortee). The hybrid baby is the soul, or animus, of the aborted fœtus restored to life. In other words, the fœtus hasn't really been aborted at all, but lives on in a 'heaven' (aboard a 'Mother Ship' yet) from which it can never return in physical form. The only way it can be revisited is by returning to the alien incubatorium, that is by repeat abductions. Abduction, repeated as often as may be necessary, is an attempt to expiate guilt, an intentional act."

Fantasies and post-traumatic stress from surgical experiences, or unconscious memories of medical procedures featured in medical TV dramas, could all conspire to create vivid abduction experiences. Alternatively, this is the work of real angels and aliens who are able to tap into our deepest yearnings and fears.

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HAUNTED SCREENS THE OCCULT ORIGINS OF TELEVISION

A century ago, **JOHN LOGIE BAIRD** publicly displayed his invention of television – a new technology that contained within it a history of occult notions, writes **BRIAN J ROBB**

We live in a world saturated with transmitted images. They used to come from the 'box in the corner of the living-room', otherwise known as the television set. These days, a television is more likely to be a wall-mounted multi-media flat-screen. That isn't the only source, though. The Internet – which initially was dominated by text – has evolved over almost three decades to become a visually-driven medium. In fact, many people access what once was called television over the Internet now, mainly through streamers and video-on-demand. For many younger people, their television is the algorithmically-dominated YouTube.

LEFT: John Logie Baird.

One fact most often quoted about the origins of television – more or less a century ago – is that it was created by Scottish inventor John Logie Baird. Little understood is what drove Baird to invent television in the first place, including his interests in Spiritualism, the occult, and science fiction. One of Baird's inspirations was an 1899 tale by HG Wells called "The Sleepers Awake", which depicted a machine that conveyed moving images across space. The earliest technologies that Baird drew upon were connected with supernatural notions like communicating with the dead, 'boosting' human telepathy, or even contacting alien beings on other worlds.

The word 'television' means 'seeing at a distance', and conjures notions of scrying through a technological crystal ball, or ideas of clairvoyance (meaning 'seeing clearly'). Baird's first significant public demonstration of television took place in January 1926 – 100 years ago.

Although an agnostic scientist, Baird – the son of a Church of Scotland minister – had experiences with Spiritualism and séances, and understood the idea of mechanical and electronic communication functioning as a medium does in a séance. Perhaps the 'hidden realities' of other worlds or even 'the other side' could be revealed through the occult early technology of television. Baird attended séances and believed himself to be in contact with the spirit of Thomas Edison, who helped him develop further his insights needed to progress his conception of television.

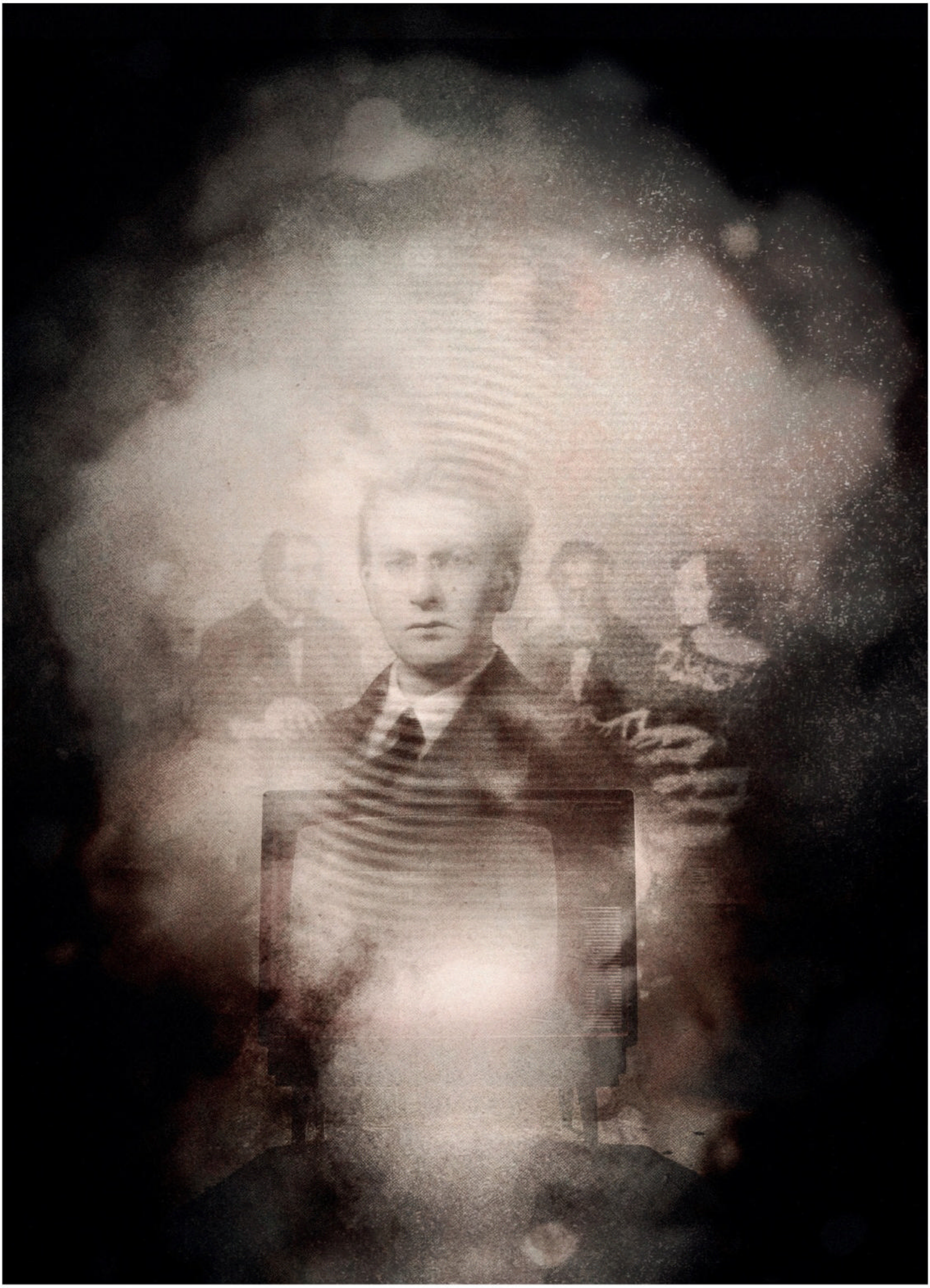
> 'TELEVISION' MEANS 'SEEING AT A DISTANCE' AND CONJURES NOTIONS OF SCRYING AND IDEAS OF CLAIRVOYANCE

To understand what drove Baird, it is necessary to understand his childhood. He was born in August 1888 in Helensburgh, a coastal town in the West of Scotland. He was the youngest of four children of the Reverend John Baird, the local Church of Scotland minister, and Jessie Morrison Inglis, from a family of wealthy shipbuilders. Baird suffered from ill health from an early age; he wasn't expected to survive beyond his first few years, but defied the odds. The conditions of turn-of-the century industrial Glasgow didn't help his health.

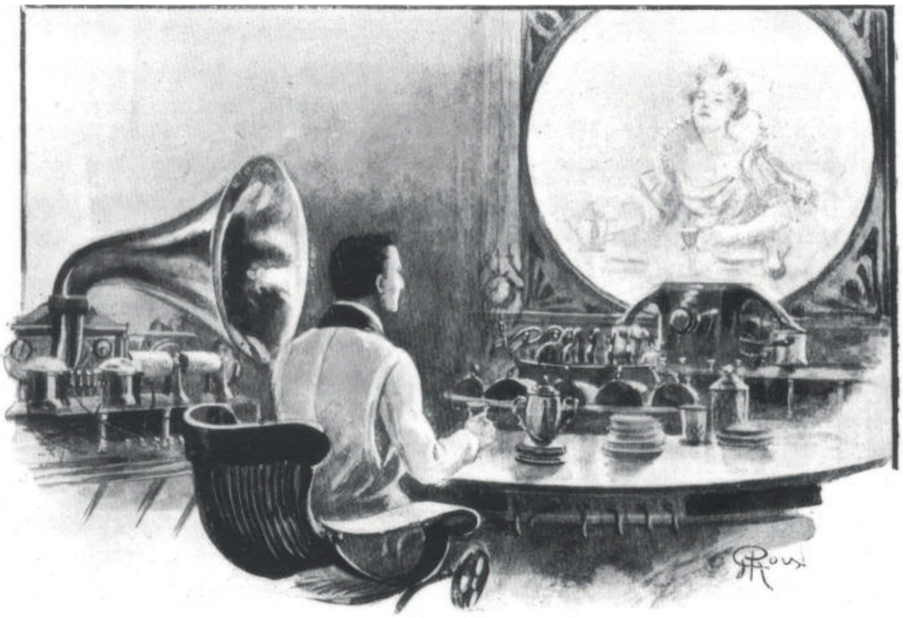
Despite not being a great student, Baird was a self-educated mechanical tinkerer. He created a home-made telephone exchange, connecting friends and neighbours. He built a home-made dynamo, providing electric light for the Baird household when others were still using gas. He formed a photographic club and immersed himself in image-making, using a magic lantern-like device to enlarge photos he'd taken. After school, from the age of 17, Baird was educated at the Royal Technical College (now Strathclyde University) and the University of Glasgow in electrical engineering and physics. It was here he began experimenting with selenium photoelectric cells – an integral part of television. World War I interrupted Baird's degree course, and he never returned to graduate. He worked in a munitions factory in 1915, as he was unfit to serve.

MAD SCIENCE

The inspiration he took from HG Wells was once again evident when Baird worked for the Clyde Valley Electrical Company. Inspired by the Wells story "The Diamond Maker", Baird hijacked the local electricity supply to manufacture diamonds from carbon through the infusion of huge amounts of electrical power; he only succeeded in causing a blackout. Baird was full of ideas, including



COMPOSITE BY ETIENNE GILFILLAN



the medicated 'Baird Undersock' (his poor circulation saw him suffer from cold feet) which, by the time he wound up the business in 1918, had made him 15 times more than he would have earned at the power plant. A short stay in Trinidad saw him attempt to run a jam-making business (using the abundant cheap fruit), only to be driven back to Britain by the inhospitable climate.

By 1920, Baird was in London and broke. His mind returned to the idea of 'television' – there was now a global race to see who would first solve the problem of transmitting 'radio with pictures'. He'd been experimenting since at least 1912, but lack of time and money had prevented any significant progress. He continued with his business ventures – importing Australian honey, and manufacturing soap – to raise funds. A downturn in his health forced him to give up on business and relocate to the coastal town of Hastings in 1922. It was in Hastings that Baird began to make serious progress with his television experiments. He built his system from the most bizarre materials –whatever he had available – including an old tea chest, a biscuit tin, pieces of cardboard, bicycle lamp lenses, darning needles, string, sealing wax, wire, glue, and an electric motor.

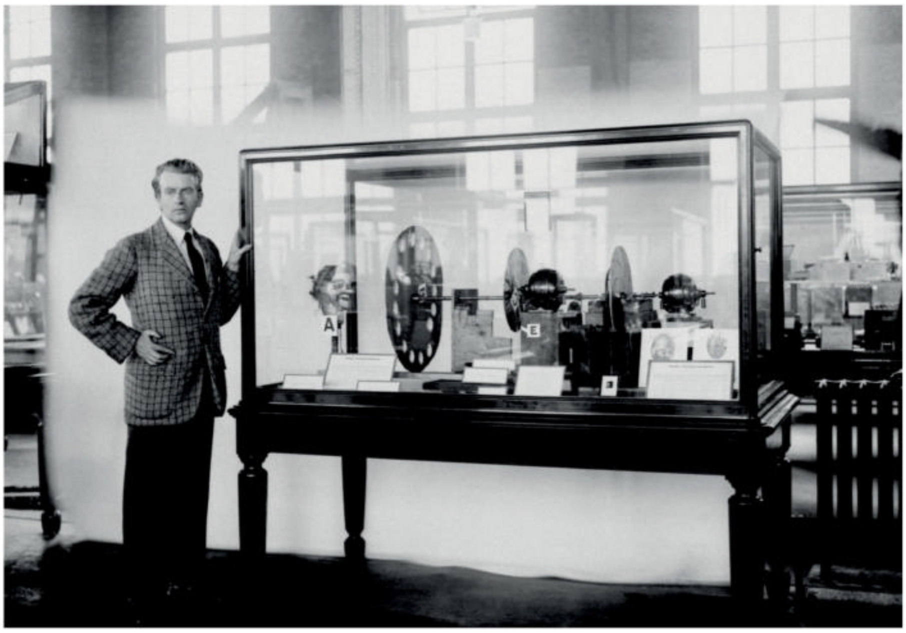
This rather slapdash kit was enough to provide the breakthrough. Baird built a large cardboard disc (the lid of a hat box), peppered with a spiral of holes (known as a Nipkow disc, after the inventor Paul Nipkow). The scanning disc would break down an image into a series of lines, converted into electrical impulses through the selenium photoelectric cells (although recent speculation has suggested he used a thallium sulphide cell), then transmitted across distance, to be received and decoded by a matching disc at the receiving end.

Baird had been forced out of his laboratory space in Hastings following a 1,000-volt electrical shock he gave himself while experimenting. He continued his work in London, displaying a rough version to the *Radio Times* and hustling the *Daily Express* newspaper for publicity. The *Express* news editor thought he had a 'mad scientist' on his hands and sent a minion to throw Baird out, with the warning: "For God's sake, go down to reception and get rid of a lunatic who's down there. He says he's got a machine for seeing by wireless! Watch him – he may have a razor on him."

It took until October 1925 for Baird to develop a satisfactory system that was capable of transmitting 'half-tone' television pictures (an improvement on his earlier 'silhouettes') across a small distance. He successfully broadcast a grayscale moving picture of the head of a ventriloquist's dummy called 'Stooky Bill' as a 32-line vertically-scanned image transmitted at five pictures per second. Grabbing an office worker from the premises below, Baird transmitted the first human face: that of a rather startled 20-year-old William Edward Taynton.

Although Baird had already demonstrated his 'silhouettes' transmissions the year before at London's Selfridges department store, the 26 January 1926 demonstration in his Soho attic laboratory of his 'televisor' receiver was the system's official debut. Assembled at Frith Street were representatives of the Royal Institution and a reporter from the *Times*, all there to witness an historic event: the first transmission and reception of recognisable images by television. Although Baird's mechanical system would be rapidly superseded by EMI-Marconi's electronic television, he nonetheless achieved a remarkable run of 'firsts'.

In 1927, Baird broadcast the first long-distance television transmissions across a telephone line stretching from London to Glasgow's Central Hotel, over 400 miles (644km). By 1928, he had demonstrated the world's first colour television transmission (dubbed 'Telechrome'), the first transatlantic broadcast from London to New York (via



TOP: An illustration from Jules Verne's story "La Journée d'un journaliste américain en 2889" showing moving images sent via the 'phonotelephote'. **CENTRE:** John Logie Baird with 'Stooky Bill'. **ABOVE:** Baird with his first television apparatus in 1926.

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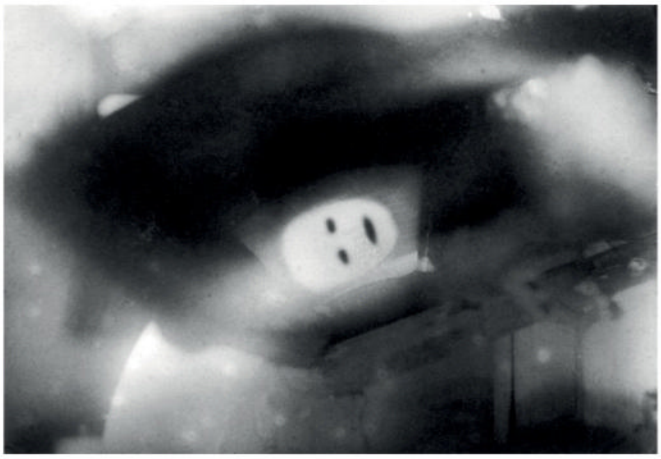
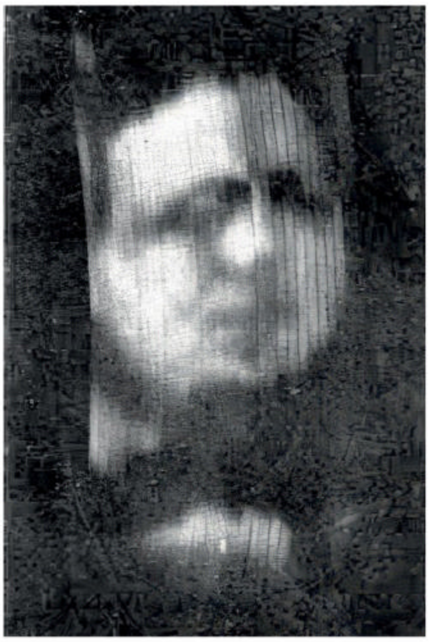
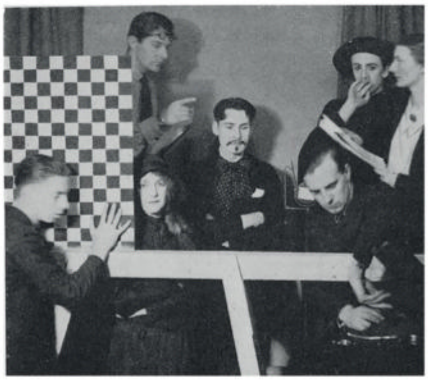






LEFT: The ghostly first image transmitted by wireless waves in 1925. **BELOW LEFT:** A photograph taken from the screen of Baird's first Televisor showing his business partner Oliver Hutchinson. **BOTTOM:** The cast of *The Man With the Flower in His Mouth*, with director Lance Sieveking at top left.

SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

short-wave radio), and in 1929 his system was adopted by the BBC for their experimental television service, which in July 1930 carried the first-ever television play, *The Man With the Flower in His Mouth* (directed by pioneering BBC producer Lance Sieveking, father of FT co-founder Paul Sieveking).

By the 1930s, Baird had conquered live broadcasting (the 1931 Derby), as well as cinema screen systems, video recording (called 'Phonovision'), high-definition television, and even 3D television. Baird lost out in a 1936 competition with the EMI-Marconi electronic system when a (potentially suspicious) fire devastated his Crystal Palace facilities, leading to the BBC adopting the Marconi all-electronic system.

Baird continued to experiment, but the war put an end to much television research for the duration. Baird's ill-health finally caught up with him in June 1946 – just as the BBC resumed its television service – when he died in his sleep after an earlier stroke, aged 57.

THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE

To many, in the early days, television must have seemed like a form of magic. That view was not entirely wrong, as television, although a scientific instrument, grew from a host of occult ideas. The birth of Spiritualism in the 1840s coincided with the establishment of long distance electric telegraphic communications. Going even further back, there was the notion of 'scrying' (seeing) across time and distance through a medium such as a crystal ball or black mirror, today widely associated with the activities of Elizabethan polymath Dr John Dee (see **FT290:74-76, 338:12-13, 413:6**).

Optical technology and electronic communications have a long history, one that is at times intimately entwined with the occult. Early optical tools, like the camera obscura and the magic lantern were equally used in scientific enquiry and spiritualistic endeavours. In the 19th century, as Spiritualism gained currency, so each new scientific breakthrough was co-opted in the service of communication with the 'other side', from photography and X-rays to microscopes and even radio. Mediums could 'dress up' their séance activities with a colourful display of the latest technology, and many of the fakers used such technologies to project voices and faces (Harry Houdini demonstrated how radio could be used to deliver voices through a 'ghost trumpet' at a séance in 1922).

THE INVENTOR OF TELEVISION CLAIMED TO HAVE RECEIVED SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE FROM EDISON

The biggest early adopters of any 'science' that purported to reveal the hidden world (the very definition of 'occult') were the world's mediums, soothsayers, and Spiritualists. Spirit photography – the capturing of images of the dearly departed – was all the rage, convincing such august figures as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (notorious for his belief in the Cottingley Fairies; see **FT53:48-53, 356:30-35, 379:58-59, 410:14-15, 459:36-43**), and for his battles with Houdini over the 'reality' of Spiritualism). The ability of X-rays to reveal the hidden interior of the human body was seen as another form of spirit photography – the ether was awash in hidden images and voices, so why not ghosts? Science didn't so much replace magic as grow from within it.

What about Baird? There has been speculation that the inventor continued his work on television during his 1919 sojourn in Trinidad. *The Secret Life of John Logie Baird* (1986) by Tom McArthur and Peter Waddell claims that Baird sought out his remote location to continue his work in secret, away from prying eyes. Baird lived in the wooden house of a local plantation owner, where the night was lit up by all sorts of strange sights and sounds. The visiting Scottish wizard soon earned the nickname 'Obeah' (or 'Black Magic Man') among the locals, who gave him a wide berth. One of them confirmed to McArthur and Waddell that he had witnessed Baird transmitting pictures across a distance of "a few hundred feet". In a 1936 newspaper interview Baird confirmed "the only progress I made in that West Indies year was towards television. I spent my nights in the jungle working out problems, and on my return to England I was ready for new experiments..."

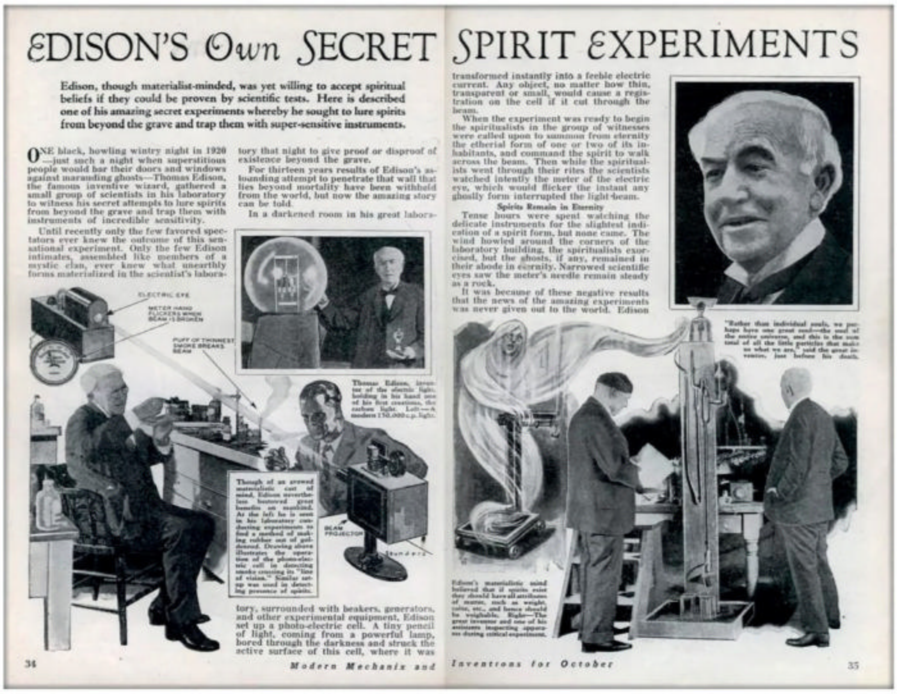
While the Fox sisters, whose activities gave rise to the Spiritualist movement, were attempting contact with the 'other side', Baird was trying to transmit images through the ether. Despite coming from an engineering and science background, Baird had his own brushes with the occult, his interest left over from his upbringing as the son of a church minister. Baird not only attended several séances, but he became convinced he could 'tune in' to messages from the other side. He recalled his first séance in his memoirs: "We waited. The darkness and silence had a most eerie effect, then the lady squeezed my hand and said in an awe-struck whisper, 'Look, it's coming'. Sure enough, faint and almost invisible, a wavering purple cloud was forming. The silence was broken by an irregular tapping; the spirit was signalling in Morse code. The message was directed to me, and it came from no less a personage than Thomas Alva Edison!"

The inventor of television claimed to have received spiritual guidance from Edison, the inventor of the electric light bulb (and much more besides, if all his often-contested claims are to be believed). This happened in the 1930s, when Baird was experimenting with something he'd dubbed 'Noctovision', an infrared version of television: "Edison had, it appeared, been experimenting with Noctovision on the astral plane, and was convinced that it would, in time, prove of great use in assisting communication between the living and those who had passed over – but the time was

ABOVE LEFT: Baird (standing) and his assistant working on the ‘Noctovisor’ in 1929. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Sir Oliver Lodge examining Baird’s ‘Noctovision’ transmitter in 1927. **BELOW:** Edison’s attempts to communicate with the spirit world pictured in a 1933 article in *Popular Mechanix and Inventions*.

not ripe and to attempt to use it now would incur grave danger.” Despite the warning, Baird continued his experiments, and his infrared camera was used by the BBC in 1933.

Despite his renowned scientific reputation, even Edison was not immune to the appeal of the supernatural. In 1920, he’d announced his plan to build a device for communicating with the dead, a ‘spirit telephone’, which he described as “an apparatus to see if it is possible for personalities which have left this Earth to communicate with us”. Marconi, the inventor of radio, claimed in 1919 to be receiving strange messages, possibly from outer space. Similarly, Tesla claimed in 1899 to have received messages transmitted from Mars (see Christopher Josiffe, “A Little History of Spirit Technology”, **FT363:30-37**, for more on these and other claims). Was it, therefore, truly beyond the bounds of possibility for an inventor as innovative as John Logie Baird to come up with a television-like device for communicating with the dead? Of the supernatural and Spiritualism, the inventor of television concluded: “I am convinced that discoveries of far-reaching importance remain, waiting along these shadowy and discredited paths...”



EDISON’S Own SECRET SPIRIT EXPERIMENTS

Edison, though materialist-minded, was yet willing to accept spiritual beliefs if they could be proven by scientific tests. Here is described one of his amazing secret experiments whereby he sought to lure spirits from beyond the grave and trap them with super-sensitive instruments.

ONE black, howling wintry night in 1920—just such a night when superstitious people would bar their doors and windows against marauding ghosts—Thomas Edison, the famous inventive wizard, gathered a small group of scientists in his laboratory to witness his secret attempts to lure spirits from beyond the grave and trap them with instruments of incredible sensitivity.

Until recently only the few favored spectators ever knew the outcome of this sensational experiment. Only the few Edison intimates, assembled like members of a mystic clan, ever knew what unearthly forms materialized in the scientist’s laboratory that night to give proof or disproof of existence beyond the grave.

For thirteen years results of Edison’s astounding attempt to penetrate that wall that lies beyond mortality have been withheld from the world, but now the amazing story can be told.

In a darkened room in his great laboratory, surrounded with beakers, generators, and other experimental equipment, Edison set up a photo-electric cell. A tiny pencil of light, coming from a powerful lamp, bored through the darkness and struck the active surface of this cell, where it was transformed instantly into a feeble electric current. Any object, no matter how thin, transparent or small, would cause a registration on the cell if it cut through the beam.

When the experiment was ready to begin the spiritualists in the group of witnesses were called upon to summon from eternity the etherial form of one or two of its inhabitants, and command the spirit to walk across the beam. Then while the spiritualists went through their rites the scientists watched intently the meter of the electric eye, which would flicker the instant any ghostly form interrupted the light-beam.

Spirits Remain in Eternity

Tense hours were spent watching the delicate instruments for the slightest indication of a spirit form, but none came. The wind howled around the corners of the laboratory building, the spiritualists exorcised, but the ghosts, if any, remained in their abode in eternity. Narrowed scientific eyes saw the meter’s needle remain steady as a rock.

It was because of these negative results that the news of the amazing experiments was never given out to the world. Edison

ELECTRIC EYE
METER HAND FLICKERS WHEN BEAM IS BROKEN
PUFF OF THINNEST SMOKE BREAKS BEAM
BEAM PROJECTOR
Saunders

Thomas Edison, inventor of the electric light, holding in his hand one of his first creations, the carbon light. Left—A modern 150,000 c.p. light.

Though of an avowed materialistic cast of mind, Edison nevertheless bestowed great benefits on mankind. At the left he is seen in his laboratory conducting experiments to find a method of making rubber out of goldenrod. Drawing above illustrates the operation of the photo-electric cell in detecting smoke crossing its “line of vision.” Similar set-up was used in detecting presence of spirits.

“Rather than individual souls, we perhaps have one great soul—the soul of the entire universe, and this is the sum total of all the little particles that make us what we are,” said the great inventor, just before his death.

Edison’s materialistic mind believed that if spirits exist they should have all attributes of matter, such as weight, color, etc., and hence should be weighable. Right—The great inventor and one of his assistants inspecting apparatus during critical experiment.

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“MUCH OF WHAT THE OLD FAIRY-TALES PROMISED HAS BEEN DELIVERED BY THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY”

FROM EARTH TO THE MOON

When the BBC began its experimental television service, using Baird’s system, on 30 September 1929, the movies were only just learning to talk. Now, radio was to be accompanied by pictures in a seemingly magical way. As Hans Bedrow, considered the ‘father’ of German television, noted: “Film and radio both stand on the verge of a new and important stage of their development. While film has hitherto merely transmitted sense impressions to the eye, now the ear, too, will play a part in receiving sound films… In contrast, while [radio] was solely directed toward the ear, television will in the future appeal to the eyes of a previously ‘sound-only’ audience.” Also in 1929, in the magazine *Broadcast*, Eduard Rhein noted: “The world will be brought to us in our own room.”

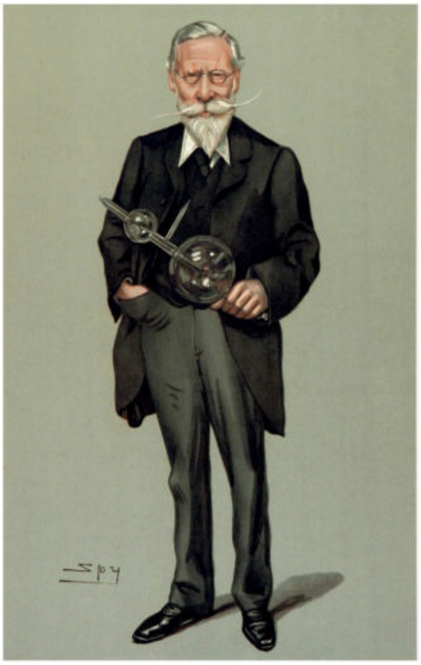
The German philosopher and cultural critic Ernst Bloch, writing in his 1929 essay “The Anxiety of the Engineer”, noted of the collision between these developing new technologies and the supernatural: “Much of what the old fairy-tales promised has been delivered by the latest technology: radio brings distant voices into a room where no one is speaking; even television is becoming thinkable, which… takes us into the realms of the magic mirror.” The ‘magic mirror’ is, of course, a well-worn trope in fairy tales from around the world describing a device used for seeing at a distance – the very meaning of ‘television’. In *The Electrical Televisor* (1902) Fritz Lux noted: “In very many inventions of recent years, we see the realisation of thoughts and ideas that have often occupied the human mind for centuries. In television we can see the fairy tale's magic mirror… which enables us to observe the deeds of people far away."

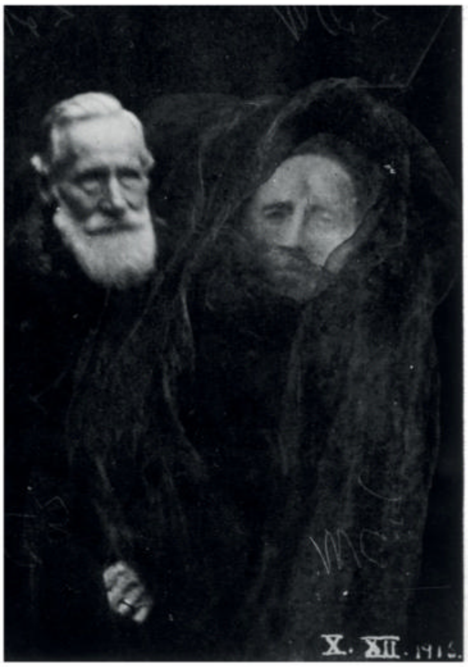
Bloch's sense of television as a 'magic mirror' was reinforced by the likes of Eugen Diesel who, in his 1929 essay "The Uncanny of the Technological Age", delved deeper into the idea that television brought with it a sense of the uncanny: "What was hitherto seen only in dreams or belonged to the realm of the miraculous is now available in everyday experience." Diesel saw the very mechanics of television as magical, with broadcasting collapsing any sense of time and place: what was seen on the television screen was "a whole new artificial world… in which nothing could be certain", reducing material reality to a ghostly phantom captured in a mysterious box.

That same year a Spiritualist publication ran an article exploring 'Domestic Phenomena', citing such things as "nocturnal wall inscriptions", "inexplicable light apparitions", and "knocking sounds", all of which now emanated from the domestic television. Previously, the supernatural and the scientific had largely been separate realms, but as people began to experience television, it seemed as though those two opposing worlds had collided.

Clairvoyance and television began to seem like closely related phenomena; early adverts for television sometimes connected the device that depicted events far away with a crystal ball. 'Television' joined a litany of other mystical terms, like 'telepathy', telekinesis', and 'teleplasty' (the creation of thought forms, such as a tulpa). The new technological word fitted the established supernatural lexicon. The idea of 'psychic television' (as outlined in multiple 19th century Spiritualist texts) concerned the transmission of images from one place to another where distance is no object (unlike clairvoyance, which was regarded as a short-range phenomenon) by psychic means, usually through a medium. Just as psychics had to precisely 'tune in' to each other, it was necessary for a television receiver to precisely 'tune in' to a broadcaster to receive image and sound.

The connections between science and the supernatural were much closer in the late-19th and early-20th century than people care to recall. Physicist Oliver Lodge and chemist William Crookes were the foremost men in their respective fields, yet both were dedicated Spiritualists and both served as presidents of the Society for Psychical Research. This crossover between occultism and the 'natural sciences' was more accepted by both scientists and Spiritualists. Crookes not only conceived of wireless telegraphy, he also explored telepathy with equal seriousness. In 1879, he even developed an early version of the cathode ray tube, central to the development of electrical television, dubbed the 'Crookes tube'. Occult notions and thought experiments fed into actual experimentation with the various devices and components necessary to bring about the invention of television – whether help was forthcoming from beyond the veil from Edison or not.





CHRONICLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TOP LEFT: William Crookes pictured in *Vanity Fair* holding his early version of the cathode ray tube. **TOP RIGHT:** Crookes with the image of Lady Crookes in a spirit photo by William Hope. **ABOVE:** The Apollo 11 transmissions sent images back to Earth from the Moon using cameras based on Baird's system.

John Logie Baird's mechanical television technology even made it to the Moon. In 1969, it was imperative that NASA successfully transmit images from the Moon back to Earth depicting the historic moment when American astronaut Neil Armstrong exited the Lunar Module onto the surface of Earth's nearest natural satellite. The equipment had to be light enough to be transported from the Earth to the Moon, yet robust enough to transmit a signal back across over 200,000 miles of space. The electronic colour television apparatus of the time was simply too cumbersome. NASA developed a lightweight, low power, more robust camera based on Baird's original mechanical system, using a spinning colour disc similar to Baird's Nipkow disc (the Apollo 11 transmissions were black and white; viewers had to wait for Apollo 12 for full-colour).

The collision of Spiritualism and science, the occult and the mechanical, gave rise to the concept and practical reality of television. Spiritualist theories of 'psychic telesight' prepared the way for John Logie Baird (and others) to develop an actual system for the fulfilment of that dream. The barriers that separated the occult, electrical engineering, and science were more porous a century ago, when Baird made his triumphant first public demonstration of television.

BRIAN J ROBB is a regular contributor to Fortean Times and the author of books on Philip K Dick, silent cinema, the Star Wars movies and Walt Disney, as well as a guide to JRR Tolkien's Middle-earth. He is a Founding Editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website and lives in Edinburgh.

MARTIN'S DEVILS

EMILIA UKKONEN recounts the story of the Ylöjärvi Poltergeist of 1885, one of Finand's best attested cases thanks to the existence of court records and multiple witness testimonies.

One hundred and forty one years ago, in January 1885, something strange was happening in a humble croft in the village of Keijärvi in rural Finland. Knives whizzed through the air, shoes walked by themselves and stones were tossed into the house by an invisible hand.

Keijärvi is part of the larger settlement of Ylöjärvi, today a large city in southwest Finland with a population of 33,700. Back in 1885, it was a small rural township of less than 2,600 people.

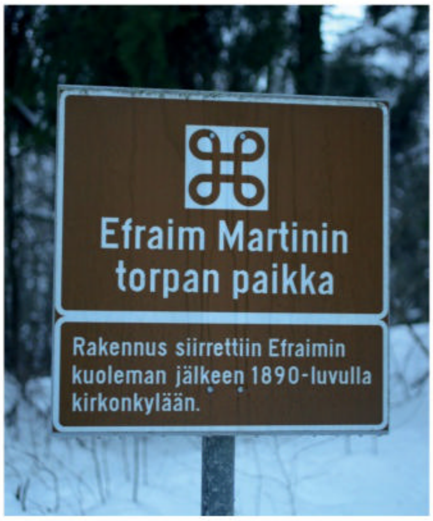
To get there, I took a bus from Helsinki via Tampere to Ylöjärvi, and from there continued my trip on foot. Keijärvi, an outlying district of Ylöjärvi, is named after the lake which lies behind its houses and fields. This part of Ylöjärvi is still very rural and along the dirt road that leads to the spot where the events took place one can see some old barns and sheds that might have been there in the Martins' time. Most of the houses that stand along the way are newer, but there remains the bucolic atmosphere of a place that hasn't changed much over the intervening decades.

But 141 years ago a series of strange events shattered the peace of this small settlement and brought Ylöjärvi to the attention of the country's newspapers.

"THE WORKINGS OF THE DEVIL"

The information we have about the affair comes mostly from court records of the events. The son of the Martins, Berndt Erland Martin, although he was not present himself at the time of the incidents, nevertheless knew about them in great detail. Twenty years after the poltergeist outbreak, Berndt published a booklet called *Ylöjärvi's Ghost Stories*, which contained a Finnish translation of the court records from 1885.

Efraim Martin, a former teacher and chair of the local council, lived in the house with his wife Eva Charlotta and their 13-year-old maid Emma Lindroos. Efraim had also worked as the secretary and accountant of the local church. Emma Lindroos was developmentally disabled and bedridden with tuberculosis. Efraim Martin was already 71 years old when the events started, and his wife was 77 years old. Three of their five children had survived into adulthood and had already moved elsewhere. The Martins were known as reliable and decent people, and they had lived peacefully in the village for 44 years. Nothing unusual had ever happened there before.


Efraim Martinin
torpan paikka
Rakennus siirrettiin Efraimin kuoleman jälkeen 1890-luvulla kirkonkylään.

LEFT: A sign marking the original site of Efraim Martin's croft. **OPPOSITE:** A dirt road in Ylöjärvi looking much the same as it would have done at the time of the 1885 poltergeist outbreak.

EMILIA UKKONEN

THE DESK DRAW SUDDENLY FLEW OPEN: PAPERS WENT FLYING AND ITS CONTENTS WERE FLUNG TO THE FLOOR

Tampere's morning newspaper published its first report of the strange happenings on 22 January 1885 under the headline "The workings of the Devil – superstition or Spiritualism?" The newspaper claimed that the Devil himself had recently been roaming around a certain house in Ylöjärvi. The events gave the newspapers of the time a lot to write about and the people reading them to talk about. Many papers sent their representatives to cover the "roaming of the devils".

At the time, the weird goings-on were usually referred to as the "Devil of Ylöjärvi". Later, people started referring to the case as "Martin's Devils" or "Martin's Demons". Many newspapers simply treated the case as a ghost story, although it was never suggested by any of those involved that the spirit of a deceased person had caused the disturbances.

When news of the events spread through the newspapers and by word of mouth, people began arriving in Ylöjärvi from near and far. Sometimes there were crowds outside the Martins' house and people rushed in, disturbing the residents at their daily chores. Disturbed by these crowds – clearly there for their own amusement, drinking and being rowdy – and disturbed by the strange events, Efraim Martin had to move to Tampere for a few days to stay with his relatives and get some peace.

The drunkenness and disorderly behaviour caused the head of the local constabulary to visit the place. At the end of January, a representative of the Ylöjärvi Court made a report to the County Governor's office about the strange things that had been happening in Efraim Martin's house, which, he said, needed to be addressed. This all led to the Martins being accused of both witchcraft and the illegal sale of alcohol.

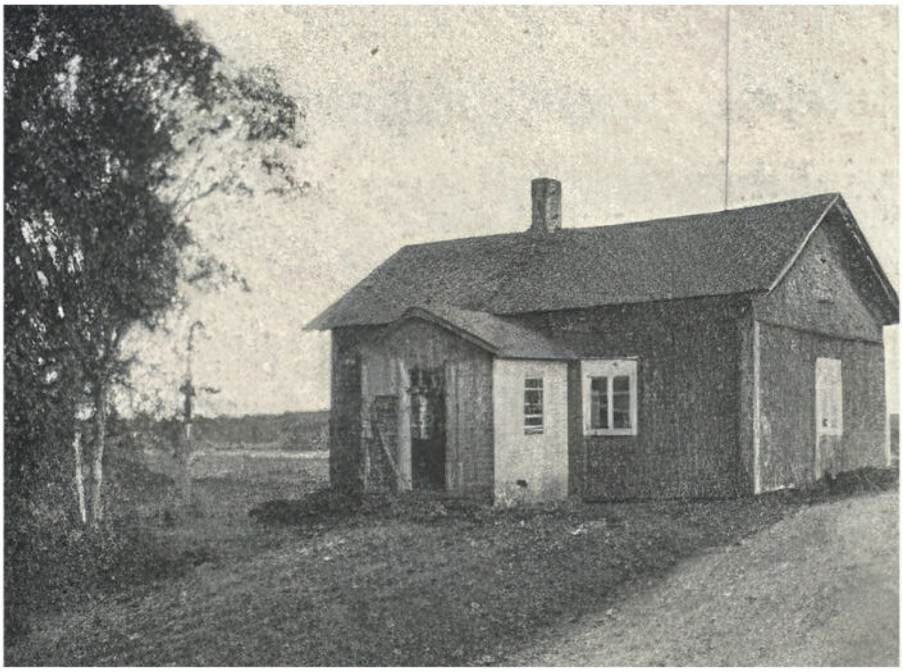
THE OUTBREAK BEGINS

The strange events that were to become known as "Martin's Devils" had begun on 12 January 1885 and continued for two weeks, when they ended just as suddenly as they had started. Because the incidents led to a court hearing, we have fairly accurate information and records about what had happened.

The events of January began when the door of the Martins' room flew open in the middle of the night. The door then slammed shut, but immediately afterwards opened itself again. This happened three times that night. In the morning, Efraim woke up again to a loud crash: a large pile of plaster and mortar had materialised from nowhere and fallen to the floor. Upon thorough investigation the next morning it was established that no plaster was missing from the walls, ceiling, or anywhere else in the house. The pile of plaster might as well have fallen from the sky.

Next day, the haunting continued in a most remarkable fashion. The desk drawer suddenly flew open: papers went flying and all its contents were flung to the floor. Efraim's glasses, three pairs of coffee cups and a few plates were broken in the crash. A hymn book on the table flew across the room, hitting the door. Moreover, the candlestick atop the cabinet was thrown from its place, bizarrely twisting this way and that through the air, as though carried by an invisible force, before also crashing into the door. The keys to the door leading to the bedchamber completely vanished, and the pots

JANI-MARKUS HASA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



LEFT: Martin's croft at the time it was put up for auction in 1890. **BELOW:** All that remains of the house at its original location are some foundation stones among the trees.

in the milk room were turned upside down. In the barn, it was found that all four of the legs of one of their sheep were tied together, while the bucket in front of the cow was upended and the animals' fodder had been tossed around.

During the subsequent enquiry, Efraim and his wife Eva assured the court that they had never associated with evil spirits. They swore that any accusations of witchcraft were baseless, as were the accusations of selling and drinking alcohol. Their maid, Emma Lindroos, was ill and simple-minded, and could not have carried out the secret schemes she was accused of.

Many other strange events took place at the Martins' farm. A pair of shoes began to move by themselves slowly across the floor, one behind the other. Clay accumulated inexplicably on the floor, without anyone touching it or knowing where it had come from or how it had gotten there. Three full baskets of this mysterious clay accumulated. Thin fragments of slate hurtled through the air inside the house; slate does not occur naturally in the area and cannot be found anywhere in the surrounding terrain. One day a pile of shingles that was standing in the corner of the croft scattered into the air, and the shingles started spinning around one another. Two bread-drying rods that were standing in the corner of the room began to dance along the floor and collided. Martin's wife then came in, took one of the rods in her hand and slapped the floor three times, saying at the same time: "Well, behave yourself!" This done, she put the rod in the corner and turned away, whereat the rod leapt up three more times and dashed to the floor. All of these things happened in broad daylight.

In addition to the Martins, 15 people who witnessed the strange events during those two weeks testified in court. The witnesses had not seen anyone at the farm do anything to create these phenomena and did not believe the bizarre behaviour of the objects was caused by human agency, instead believing that some unknown and invisible force was responsible. The witnesses also had not observed any sale or use of alcohol by the Martins.

RUMOURS CIRCULATED THAT EMMA LINDROOS HAD BEEN THROWING OBJECTS AND ACTING AS THE 'INVISIBLE SPIRIT'

EMILIA UKKONEN

WITNESS ACCOUNTS

I'd like to share the testimony of a few eyewitnesses to convey the sort of events that took place during the two weeks of the haunting.

Efraim Eerola visited the cabin on 14 January, after the initial events, and first noticed the window panes, floor and furniture covered with clay. A large knife whizzed past his face six times, without hitting him. His first impression was that the knife had come from the adjacent room and was moved by an invisible force. When he finished smoking and set down his pipe, it flew into the air of its own accord.

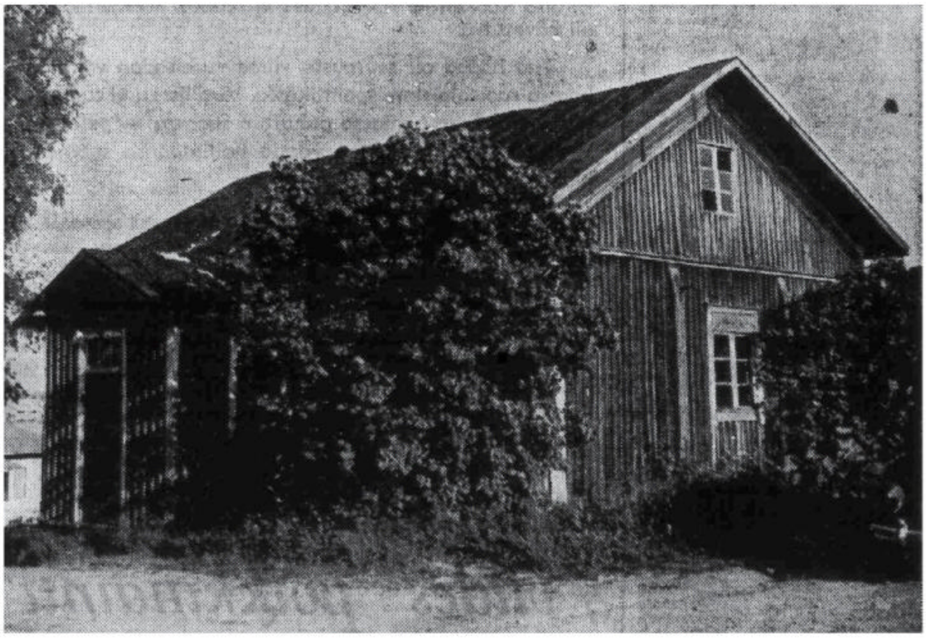
One day, Eerola saw a number of objects and books apparently teleported out of a table drawer that was tied shut with strong rope – which proved unable to stop them from being flung into the air. When the Martins told him their sheep's legs were mysteriously tied together in the barn Eerola went to set the animal free; upon returning to the house, he found the doorknob inexplicably spinning in its hole.

At the farm, Eerola also saw strange stones under the table, along with Mr Martin's glasses, which had also somehow escaped from the same drawer that was tied shut. The lenses of these glasses were partially broken and looked burnt. Eerola also witnessed a large pile of glass medicine bottles that had appeared on the table begin to dance about and spill fizzing acids and noxious potions. Ladles, spoons and other kitchen items suddenly appeared in the oven, where they caught fire.

All these events and many others were seen by Eerola over the course of a few days, and he swore under oath that they were not caused by people, but by spirits or other forces unknown to him. Eerola also swore that there was no cellar under Martin's croft where someone could hide and produce these events unseen, and that no chamber could be concealed under the floor as the house was built on solid rock.

Sexton Karl Lindell and his wife Amanda visited Martin's farm on the last day of the haunting. He had originally gone there to help Efraim Martin write a newspaper article about the events. After they talked for a while, a stool landed in front of the witness, legs turned upwards. His wife was there to witness this as well. The men went off to prepare a statement about these events for the newspaper, going to the building at the end of the yard. A this point, a basket made of wooden slats landed in the witness's lap with a hissing sound. When he went in to fetch his wife, he heard a loud crash in the hall, but there was no one there but Martin's wife and Emma Lindroos.

Lindell saw a large, two-leaf dining table with both of its sections clapping together of their own accord like a pair of busy hands. The sections of the table began moving with increasing violence, echoing loudly in the room. They then decided to tie down the leaves of the table with rope; thus secured,



Efraim Martin
1814 †1890
JA HÄNEN PUOLISONSA
Eva Charlotta
SYND. LILIUS
1809 †1890

ABOVE LEFT: A newspaper photo of the relocated and run-down croft before its demolition in 1966. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The grave of Efraim and Eva Martin in Ylöjärvi churchyard. **BELOW:** The case continues to fascinate people and provided the inspiration for Finnish writer Päivi Alasalmi's 2018 novel *Riivatut* ('the Haunted').

they became motionless, but began to make a hissing sound that seemed to emanate from the joint between the leaves. Next, the table leapt several inches off the floor three times. When they moved the table to the middle of the floor it finally became still, even when the rope was removed.

The witness swore that the phenomena occurred due to an invisible force. Emma Lindroos, who was resting in bed the whole time, got up after the table was moved into place saying, "Now it has tied me up too." She began to unravel a rope that had been wrapped many times around her waist.

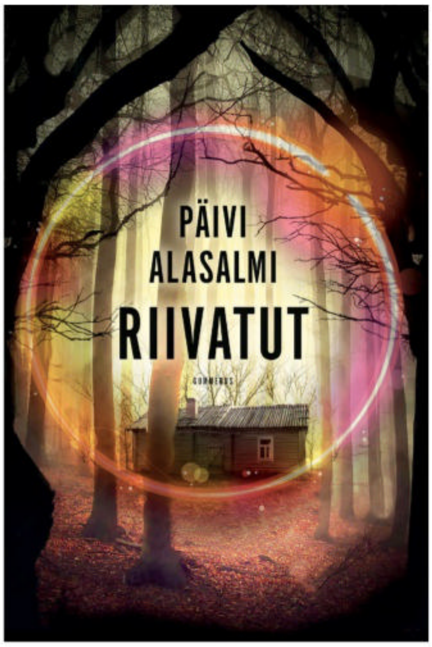
Josefina Lindroos saw a box of matches fly through the air across the room at great speed, hitting the window sill and falling onto the table. The next day, when she went into the hall, the key to the door came loose from the keyhole and flew at her, falling to the floor at her feet. One Sunday, she was standing by the table in the hall and felt someone pushing at her feet under the table, but there was no one there.

Rumours circulated that Emma Lindroos was behind the events and that it was she who had been throwing various objects around and acting as the 'invisible spirit'. It is, however, not credible that a seriously ill and largely bedridden girl could be responsible for everything that was going on.

This is just a small selection of all the strange things that happened at the croft and which were confirmed in court by eyewitnesses. After 16 days, the haunting stopped.

CASE CLOSED?

After his examination, the prosecutor found there was no evidence to show that either the Martins or Emma Lindroos were to blame for the goings-on at the farm. No evidence of witchcraft was uncovered. According to the court, no crime could be said to have occurred. The accusation of selling alcohol without a license was also judged to be unfounded.



Reading the witness statements and everything else I could find about this case, I consider it highly unlikely that Emma could have staged all of the varied phenomena described; even if some pranking did take place, it seems to me that genuine poltergeist activity was at work at Martin's croft, probably focused on the 13-year-old Emma. The poltergeist encounters that have been reported around the world from different places and in different eras tend to have one thing in common: the events often occur around prepubescent teens, especially around young girls. Emotional turbulence and serious illness also seems to act as a catalyst for these sorts of occurrences.

The 15 witnesses who testified had no obvious reason to present false information, especially under oath in a court of law. The Martins were well-known to everyone in the community and viewed as reliable and upstanding people – after all, they were an elderly couple who had lived in the area for more than 40 years without incident. They did not benefit in any way from the strange events, financially or otherwise; in fact, the opposite was true. Efraim used to make part of his living writing up estate inventories and other official papers, and because of the newspaper coverage of the events on the farm, this source of income dried up.

Both Efraim Martin and his wife died five years later in 1890 and are buried in Ylöjärvi churchyard where their weathered tombstone still stands. All the people who personally witnessed the case are long gone and only their written testimonies remain to tell us of their experiences.

The croft of Efraim Martin, where these bizarre events took place, no longer stands. After the deaths of the Martins the house, and all their other property, was sold at auction to the highest bidder – a miller called Aleksander Grönfors from Hämeenkyrö. In 1918, Grönfors had the main farm building moved to the other side of Lake Keijärvi beside the Tiikonoja bridge at the border of the village. The old haunted house slowly decayed for more than 75 years, until only the facade was left. In July 1966 it finally had to be demolished.

At the original site of Efraim Martin's croft, there is now a forest, and the only remains of the once notorious poltergeist house are the stone foundation piles and a nearby commemorative plaque.

EMILIA UKONNEN is a visual artist and writer interested in the bizarre and strange. She spends her time investigating the paranormal and writing about it. She lives in Helsinki, Finland, but travels to the UK and other parts of the world to research these topics.

A Collection of Curious Occurrences

Dedicated follower of weirdness ROB GANDY returns with another collection of real-life encounters with strange phenomena – in this case a famly who appear to be magnets for high strangeness, ranging from doppelgängers and ghostly children to spooky woodland entities...

Readers of *Fortean Times* will know that I have written regularly about real-life experiences of road ghosts, phantom hitchhikers and other apparitions. However, I also come across people who have had a series of varying encounters with strange phenomena; see for example, *The Hauntings of David Barton* (**FT371:40-44**). None of them claim to be psychic and they all seem to be genuinely puzzled and intrigued by what happened to them. I would be tempted to call them 'Haunted People', but the incidents are often so diverse and widely spaced in time that there are no apparent patterns. I came across one such person when he contacted me by letter following my interview with Neil Oliver on *GB News* on 23 April 2022 about Scunthorpe's Scotter Road Spectre (**FT411:48-52**).[1] I have given him the pseudonym 'Tommy Harris', and have similarly used pseudonyms for all of his family. I have his different addresses on file, but the reasons for maintaining confidentiality will become self-evident as you read on...

THE GERMAN SLAVE LABOURER

In the summer of 1981, 21-year-old Tommy was a British soldier posted with his regiment to Wolfenbüttel on the West German border. He had recently completed a tour of Northern Ireland, where he had been 'in the thick of it' for almost two years, and so his senses, or 'combat intuition', were in a 'hyper' state. He was assigned to armoured vehicles as a gunner/radio operator on Scimitar tanks; and as a 'Tankie' he wore black denim overalls.

Newly married, Tommy was allocated a ground-floor flat in a block on Elbinger Strasse. On his way home one day he decided to locate the storage space in the basement of the block. He went down the stairs and entered a small storeroom, in the corner of which was a soldier packing a Married Families Office box. When Tommy spoke, the soldier turned round and screamed. Realising Tommy was a fellow soldier he calmed down. "Jesus!" he said. "I thought you were the black shadow that's been seen in these blocks scaring the crap out of people." The two of them laughed and exchanged banter, and Tommy thought no more of it. Shortly afterwards he was moved from Cyclops Squadron to Nero Squadron (the Headquarters Squadron of 2nd Royal Tank Regiment) and promptly placed on the Regimental/Garrison Police.

ABOVE: Modern housing blocks on Elbinger Strasse in Wolfenbüttel, Germany.

> Tommy opened his eyes and saw a strange man sitting on the end of his bed

One Friday in July Tommy knocked off duty at lunchtime and went back to his flat. He had lunch with his wife and then lay down on their bed, listening to music through headphones. Around 2.30pm he opened his eyes and saw a strange man sitting on the end of the bed watching him. The man nodded, and Tommy nodded back, saying "Good Day" in German (he was fairly proficient in the basics of the language given that it was his second time in the country). The two men then started to talk, although all the while Tommy was wondering what the hell a strange man was doing in his bedroom, and why his wife had let him in. Even today, Tommy can still picture the man: he was in his early 30s, 5ft 10in (1.7m) tall, and skinny with a No. 1 haircut. He wore a dirty vest, dirty faded grey/blue striped pyjama trousers, and had a hat of the same material rolled up in his hands. As they continued chatting Tommy's wife Diana walked in and asked her husband who he was talking to? Tommy told her it was the man sitting on his bed, and asked why she had let him in? "What man?" she replied. Ignoring her, the man stood up and continued talking to Tommy, who now found himself conducting two conversations. His wife was becoming increasingly agitated, and the man continued to talk. This carried on for a few minutes, and only ended when the man walked through the wall adjoining the flat next door.

Tommy estimates that the time from when he first saw the man to when he disappeared was well over five minutes, possibly 10. He readily accepts that he was in a bit of a dream state, having just woken up, and with a slight case of PTSD after Ulster he could have been hallucinating. But then there was a pounding on the couple's front door, so violent that Tommy thought that the hinges might not hold. Diana was naturally worried, and with images from *The Shining* coming to mind, Tommy opened the door. Linda, who lived next door and was the wife of a soldier in the Royal Signals, burst past him cradling her baby. She was "a big lass" and was completely hysterical. On eventually calming down she told Tommy and Diana about how she had been feeding her child, when a black shadow came through the adjoining wall between their flats and walked across the living room between her and the television she was watching. It then exited through the opposite wall. Understandably, she got up and ran to her neighbours' flat to wait for her husband to come home.

About a month later, Tommy found himself talking to the camp's German Liaison Officer, who had been a member of the Wehrmacht on the base during WWII. Tommy hadn't mentioned his experience, but in conversation the Liaison Officer asked if he was married, and whether he was in quarters? Tommy responded in the affirmative, to which the Liaison Officer commented: "When these barracks were built before the war, they used slave labourers from the concentration camp system. They were treated horribly, and their barracks were where your flats are now." That's when Tommy put two and two together. What clothing did these workers wear? The striped uniform of concentration camp inmates…

LEFT: A forced labourer wearing the distinctive striped uniform of the Nazi concentration camp system.

GLASSHOUSE IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE FIGURE IN THE DOORWAY

Tommy and Diana divorced amicably after 20 years of marriage, and both had met new partners. Prior to Tommy's moving into a new home with Sally, on 23 November 2000, the two of them found themselves in his old house in Northam, Devon, a modern semi-detached built in 1969. Tommy says the house had always had an oppressive atmosphere; friends didn't like visiting and if they did it was during daylight and not for long. The activity over the preceding 10-year period could be described as uncomfortable.

It was sometime between 8 and 10pm, and it was dark and dry outside. Everything was packed ahead of exchanging contracts and moving out the next day. The walls were bare and there was no furniture other than two old dining chairs and a small dining table that Tommy and Sally planned to throw out. The two of them were sitting on the dining chairs watching television when a shadow, as tall as the doorframe and as "black as night", walked into the doorway which led to the hall. Both Tommy and Sally saw it; it was cloaked, wore a hat, was silent and stood there for about two minutes as though watching or listening. The light was on in the adjacent kitchen, illuminating the hall and part of the living room. Whatever this entity was, it filled the doorway and blocked the light from the kitchen, throwing the hallway and most of the hall and living room into darkness. Tommy thinks it might have been unaware of their presence, given they were sitting in the dark. The figure then turned and walked into the kitchen. Once he had got over the shock, Tommy jumped up and followed it. But there was nothing in the kitchen: the windows were all bolted, and the back door was locked. There was no way whatever it was could have got out, and there was nowhere for something that large to hide. He describes the event as "bloody scary", and, unsurprisingly, was glad to see the back of the house. Some years later, Tommy and Sally mentioned the episode to a Methodist minister, who asked what they had done. Their response was "Nothing – we were moving out the next morning."

GHOSTLY KIDS

Tommy and Sally lived in a house in Great Torrington, a market town in Devon, from the early/mid 2000s, before moving to their current address. It had been a pair of late-Victorian 'one-up, one-down' cottages, with an adjoining terrace of three cottages at the rear. The two properties were turned into one house in 1960, with alleyway access to the rear properties (which were also converted into one house) being moved to the right-hand side. When they moved in their son Geoff was two and their daughter Cathy was four. What they had not expected was that the house would be actively haunted by at least three ghostly children (as well as other phantoms). Set out below are examples of the phenomena that they experienced, which were obviously unnerving for the family:

The 'ghostly kids' were often heard playing quietly in Geoff and Cathy's bedrooms with the children's toys, and footsteps (running and walking) could be heard in the bedrooms upstairs when the family were on the ground floor, with the floorboards creaking and moving.

Both Geoff and Cathy were regularly woken up in the middle of the night to play. Cathy got quite "arsey" about this as she got older. The 'ghostly kids' also talked to the children, telling them about previous residents: who they did and didn't like, who scared them, who sold drugs, and who did bad things.

Cathy has clear recollections of the nightly visitors. The eldest was 'Peter', who was in his late-teens and spoke with a slight accent. There was a little girl, possibly called 'Lillabeth', who was very shy but liked to play with Cathy's toys. 'Lillabeth' was about 10 years old, and wore little girl's Victorian clothes. There was also a little boy who was mischievous and very angry, although Cathy cannot remember his name. This boy looked angry all the time, but she didn't know what accent he had because he wouldn't talk; he was 16 or 17 years old, but small for his age, and wore a baggy white shirt and brown trousers.

Tommy and Sally often heard 'Lillabeth' playing with Cathy's toys, and they could hear her talking to herself as children do when playing with dolls. The first few times they thought it was their daughter – but then remembered she was at school. If one of them went into Cathy's bedroom the talking stopped; but if they sneaked up to the doorway the whispering continued. However, as soon as they revealed themselves by entering the doorway, the talking stopped immediately. The outline of 'Lillabeth', wearing a 'whitish' dress was regularly and clearly seen in peripheral vision. She seemed to like to sit on the stairs and watch family life go on around her.

In the evening, the 'ghostly kids' could be heard creeping down the stairs trying to be quiet, much like normal children who cannot sleep or have had a nightmare. Their hands were heard sliding down the banister and the treads creaked. Geoff and Cathy even saw one of the 'kids' when he peered around the door frame into the living room; he looked about 10 or 11, pale, and with scruffy brown hair.

Tommy once saw one of the 'kids', who was maybe eight or nine: he shot through the wall of the dining room so fast Tommy thought he had imagined it.

LOBSTERTHERMIDOR / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Tommy and his family were living in Great Torrington, north Devon, at the time of many of the strange events that seemed to cluster around them. **FACING PAGE:** An image of a strange 'orb' seen by Sally in 'Spooky Woods' and captured on her mobile phone camera.

There were regular raps from the understairs cupboard, which was disconcerting to say the least.

Geoff had a run-in with an angry-looking young woman, who was in her mid-twenties, pale, with blue lips, black hair tinged with grey, and wearing a white dress. She scowled at him, but when he approached her, she backed away.

One night Geoff was awoken and spoken to by a man in an old railway uniform, who told him he'd been killed at Torrington Station. Upon enquiry, Tommy and Sally found that a rail worker *had* been killed in an accident at the station many years previously.

Geoff saw a large orange orb – about the size of a small football – cross his path when he was sitting at the top of the stairs. It came through his sister's bedroom wall, floated from left to right and went into the wall opposite, which was Tommy and Sally's bedroom wall. He shouted out and then ran into his parents' bedroom expecting to see it; but there was nothing there. Both Tommy and Sally were in their bedroom and had not seen anything – certainly not a large, orange orb coming through the wall.

At Christmas, the house positively buzzed with excitement and the phenomena became very active, with the 'ghostly kids' seeming to get as much out of the festivities as Geoff and Cathy.

One curious thing that Tommy and Sally picked up on was that if they ever discussed selling up and moving on, then events would happen to stop the idea dead in its tracks. After a while, they both realised that if they wanted to talk about moving then it had to be done well away from the property. Geoff and Cathy would approach them and tell them that the 'ghost kids' did not want them to leave and had said "Please don't go!" But none of the conversations about moving were conducted in front of their children or involved them; so, they had no inkling of what was said or discussed.

The entity hopped from chimney to chimney and "was up to no good"

From the above, it will be appreciated that the 'ghostly kids' regularly used the stairs to travel between the ground and upper floors. What is intriguing is the fact that these stairs, which were central to the house, did not exist prior to the 1960 renovations. As Tommy points out, this is wholly inconsistent with the 'Stone Tape' theory. He adds that he was fortunate in that two or three major incidents that he experienced had witnesses who heard or saw exactly what he did, providing corroboration.

The phenomena happened so often that if things went quiet and no incidents occurred then they were notable by their absence. Looking back, Tommy and Sally feel that that there could have been some form of portal close to (or even inside) the house. They say that there were "one or two gnarly entities" that seemed to suddenly arrive in the vicinity and then move on after a period. Tommy remembers one episode in which he knew one of them was present, and although he couldn't actually see it, he *knew* where it was and what it looked like. It hopped from chimney to chimney – much like Johnny Bartlett in the film *The Frighteners* – and "was up to no good". Tommy felt an immense pressure on his chest, which induced a feeling of panic; he told Sally that the entity was looking to cause death. The next day their next-door neighbour, who was in his early 50s, died of a massive heart attack.

DOPPELGÄNGERS

During the 15 or so years that Tommy and Sally lived in Great Torrington a doppelgänger of Tommy appeared. Once, Geoff saw his dad in his work-shed – but he had just left Tommy in the house. Sally's experiences were audible. On a few occasions, 'Tommy' spoke to her, reminding her of something or asking her to do him a favour; she thought he had come home or was in the room talking directly to her. But in each case, Tommy wasn't at home or was in the garden, 100 feet (30m) away. On one occasion, when Sally was severely ill, she had agreed to make Tommy a chocolate birthday cake, but her illness and the medication had forced her to go to bed. After a period, she was woken up when 'Tommy' told her that she had got a cake to bake and should get to it before it was too late. Tommy then arrived home to find her making the cake – he had not been in the house when Sally thought he had woken her up. Understandably, that unnerved her a bit.

THROWING STONES

There are two local areas which Tommy and his family refer to as 'Spooky Woods' and 'Spooky Hollow'.[2] Both have eerie atmospheres, but the family nevertheless enjoy visiting, particularly for evening walks. The walk from the hamlet where they start to the bottom of 'Spooky Hollow' is about one and a quarter miles (2km); the stretch that goes through 'Spooky Woods' is between a quarter and half a mile. It is then just shy of two more miles (3.2km) to the nearest village.

On one occasion in 2017 between 11pm and midnight, Tommy was walking on his own through Spooky Woods to meet up with Sally, Cathy and Geoff. He became increasingly disconcerted as he kept hearing heavy footsteps behind him, which stopped every time he turned around, as if mocking him. By the time he emerged from the woods he had gone through sets of new batteries on four torches. On meeting up, Sally agreed that she would do that part of the walk next time, which she did three to four weeks later. Like Tommy, she didn't like hanging around in the woods and brought their dog for company. The dog absolutely would not leave her side, pressing himself into the side of her leg with his head busy looking everywhere. Sally had exactly the same experiences with a series of flat batteries. She texted Tommy to say that all of the torches had stopped working. There was no one in the woods apart from her.

The 'curse' of the flat batteries only happened in Spooky Woods; and no matter how many torches were taken, new batteries were quickly drained. Interestingly, whatever the cause, it didn't affect mobile phone batteries. On another occasion, Sally managed to capture a distinctive image of an orb floating through the trees on her mobile phone

Tommy and his family believe that there is 'something' present in Spooky Woods, and they initially used the lowest performing lights they could to draw out whatever it was, and give it confidence. Bright lights did not get much of a response. The family always undertook these night walks from 11pm or midnight, and given the problems with torch batteries they found that full moons were best (and also very atmospheric).

By 2019 15-year-old Geoff had told some of his friends about 'Spooky Woods' and 'Spooky Hollow', and two of them badgered him to arrange another night walk. Tommy organised things, and so Geoff and his two mates were dropped off at Spooky Woods at midnight. Geoff had two torches, both with new batteries, and his friends each carried a torch. Tommy, Cathy (now a 17-year-old) and their dog were to walk another route, with a view to meeting up at Spooky Hollow for a cup of tea. The lads would then walk to the main village, while Tommy and Cathy returned to their car and drove to the village to pick them up and take them home. The weather was dry, with a clear sky and some moonlight.

The moment the three boys entered Spooky Woods small stones were thrown at them. Geoff's first torch immediately went flat, and he was hit by stones on his right knee and on his back. One of his friends was also hit. Stones were thrown at them from all directions, and Geoff saw a dark hooded figure hiding behind a tree. They could hear something big jumping over tree stumps and running parallel to them; it even ran up into the branches and across the canopy. Geoff saw the hooded figure once or twice in his torch beam, and the way it leapt and ran through the undergrowth suggested that it could see perfectly in the dark. When they emerged from the woods, all of their torches were flat, but the stone-throwing continued until both parties met up at Spooky Hollow. It's worth noting that when she looked up the path from where she was waiting in Spooky Hollow, Cathy could see *four* figures walking through the trees – the fourth figure was following the three boys.

After quick cups of tea, the lads continued with fresh batteries in their torches, while Tommy and Cathy went back for the car. But as soon as they had separated, the boys were shouting and Tommy and Cathy could hear stones being thrown at them. They could see the lads through the trees, albeit only by their torches. They continued to hear the boys shouting and running as they progressed to the other side of the valley.

Tommy and Cathy arrived at the village and were surprised to be joined by the lads only a few minutes later – the wait is normally up to half an hour, but the lads had been running hard. They described how at one point they had heard the entity walking behind them, and when one of his friends slipped and fell over, Geoff had turned and clearly seen it move from one tree to another. It was cloaked in black, with a slightly pointed hood, and was about seven feet tall. The cloak was wrapped around it and so no other features could be discerned. What puzzled them was how it managed to run and leap through the undergrowth and trees given that its cloak went down to the ground. Whatever it was, it jumped out of a tree as they neared the village, as if it had been waiting for them. It charged at them, but they ran away as fast as possible. As they picked up the pace it was still careering and circling them. Needless to say, they were mightily relieved to reach the village and meet up with Tommy and Cathy.

RETURN TO 'SPOOKY WOODS'

In mid-June 2024 Tommy and the family decided to revisit Spooky Woods at night for the first time since the incident described above. This was prompted in part by Tommy's recent acquisition of infra-red night sights. With him were Sally, Geoff, Cathy and Cathy's husband Madoc. Despite the wet weather, the plan was for Cathy and Madoc to walk through the woods using a dim light or light-sticks; just enough so they could keep their footings, with the ambient moonlight helping their vision. Geoff would follow at a distance using the night sights to see if anything was out there. Part of the logic was for the group to be non-threatening to any entity, and thereby rely on its curiosity to approach them.

Initially Geoff saw nothing, although at one point Madoc spotted something he thought was a signpost, but this was evidently not the case; as he approached, whatever it was darted sideways. Madoc is 6ft4in (1.9m) and he estimated that the figure was four or five inches taller than him. As he and Cathy continued their walk, they heard footsteps and rustling behind them. The footsteps mimicked theirs; if Cathy and Madoc stopped, then two or three steps later the footsteps stopped. Occasionally Madoc caught sight of a black shape moving in front or beside them. As with the 2019 episode, the entity was heard to run from tree to tree, through the branches, and jump down into and move through the undergrowth. Regrettably, because of all the foliage, Geoff wasn't able to pick anything up on the night sights. Nevertheless, he also heard the footsteps. Understandably, by this time, Madoc began whistling nervously to himself – but then the entity tried copying him, sounding like somebody without teeth trying to whistle. All three of them heard this several times; which made Madoc whistle even more.

By the time they were getting close to Spooky Hollow, Geoff had removed the night sights, but it was then that he witnessed the entity – it was crouched low and peering at them from around the side of a tree. It appeared to be (or at least looked like) the same entity from five years previously. Geoff says it resembled an image that he had seen on an online video.[3]

Tommy and Sally met up with the trio at Spooky Hollow, where they had coffee and tea. However, rather than continuing on to the nearest main village as planned, they all asked to head back to the car and to go home. No one wanted to carry on. Plainly, what had happened in the wood had shaken them and they didn't want to push their luck. Nevertheless, when Geoff, Cathy and Madoc made their way to their car, they heard the entity following them, circling amongst the trees and undergrowth, and keeping pace while maintaining its distance.

LEFT: Images from an online video; Geoff says this resembles the entity they saw in the woods.

THE THING IN RABBIT SKINS

Tommy has often wondered if the entity might be connected with something his brother saw over 40 years before, probably around 1980. The two of them had grown up in a cottage in a valley surrounded by trees, about a mile away from Spooky Woods. His brother was 16 or 17 years old at the time. He had been out all night with his mates in a neighbouring village and was walking home into the valley, which was full of mist. His attention was caught by sheep scampering away in a field opposite him on the other side of the valley. It was then that he saw what he assumed was a very large man, about seven feet (2.1m) tall, walking through the field, causing the sheep to run in all directions. Whoever or whatever it was, was dressed entirely in rabbit skins and had a large staff. He then realised that this person, or thing, was heading towards him through the thick mist; at which point he thought "Sod this!" and sprinted for home. It was three or four years before he told Tommy about the incident, and Tommy readily admits that it fair put the wind up him.

CONTAGION?

I regret to say that around 2018 Sally suffered some significant episodes of ill health that left her disabled. Obviously, I won't go into the details other than to say that she was in and out of hospital and the doctors had difficulty in making a proper diagnosis. She felt that she was experiencing 'bad luck' and that her situation was getting progressively worse. To try and improve matters the family moved away from Great Torrington. Unfortunately, Sally's health continued to deteriorate and she was unable to get the required support from the authorities, and so she moved out in 2021 because she did not want to be a burden on Tommy and the children. To compound matters, her mother became disabled around the same time, her sister and both brothers were very poorly, and her father died; it was as though everything she loved had collapsed around her.

What struck Tommy was that following Sally moving out neither he nor the children saw a single orb, had a negative thought or sensed a presence. The phenomena experienced in Great Torrington were not quite like those of a classic poltergeist case, but it would appear that there was a focus and that this was Sally.

What is notable is that Tommy, Sally, Geoff and Cathy were also continually threatened by specific neighbours, who seemed to strongly envy their loving, stable relationship and the well-being of the children. These neighbours indulged in criminality (several of them went to prison) and possibly occult practices, with evidence of Ouija activity. Tom and Sally surmised that whatever was done could have been responsible for opening the suspected portal. What is certain is that the grandmother, mother and daughter targeted Sally. If they saw her around town they would huddle together and glower, or follow her around; and as Sally's condition worsened, whenever she was going to or coming from her GP they were always in the vicinity. Tommy says that Great Torrington has a reputation among the spiritual and clairvoyant communities for being extremely negative and having dark, ritualistic associations. Many years ago, he stumbled across an old worker's shed near the town, where pentagrams, candles, pornographic pictures and needles were in evidence.

Maybe Sally's situation involved some form of contagion from the range of phenomena she had experienced, or perhaps she was the victim of occult practices. It is known that a belief in curses, once it exists, is often reinforced by other psychological tendencies, with believers looking for affirming evidence and discounting contradictory data, thereby creating confirmatory bias.[4] Nevertheless, many of the phenomena Sally observed involved multiple witnesses and cannot therefore be easily dismissed; which means that she could present a useful case study into contagion.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Tommy is a no-nonsense, down-to-earth sort of guy. He is clearly open to the reality of the phenomena that he and his family have experienced, without necessarily being able to explain them – a commendably fortean approach. That some phenomena can have a downside should always be borne in mind, and care should be taken where it might appear that occult activities are involved. I am very appreciative of Tommy approaching me with his array of experiences and am pleased to present them here. I have necessarily edited out certain details for confidentiality reasons, particularly the locations of 'Spooky Woods' and 'Spooky Hollow', where Tommy and his family believe some sort of entity is at large. Perhaps it is a *genius loci*, but from its description – a seven-foot-tall figure in a black cloak and hood – I wonder if it might be the cousin of the Scotter Road Spectre – or even the Scotter Road Spectre itself on holiday in the West Country! Stranger things have happened – although they'd be hard pressed to beat some of Tommy's experiences…

NOTES

1 The interview can be seen around 1 hour 35 minutes in: www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqbA-KeG_pA

2 Tommy and his family believe that there is something, possibly an elemental, which follows people and throws stones in this location. They respect its presence, and so do not want to reveal the locations of 'Spooky Woods', 'Spooky Hollow' and the village, as there is a danger that the area would soon be filled with ghost-hunters and psychics. Tommy once met a lady late at night on the edge of 'Spooky Woods', who had festooned trees all around with candles, ribbons and so on, and was chanting and meditating. Perhaps, she too had met the entity.

3 www.youtube.com/shorts/v8bs_wKHD7g

4 https://theconversation.com/why-do-people-believe-in-curses-121385

ROB GANDY is a Retired Visiting Professor at Liverpool John Moores University and a regular contributor to *Fortean Times*, where he writes about timeslips, road ghosts, phantom hitchhikers and football curses among other things.

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SCAN ME

Who's been Pynchon Fort's ideas?

Was Thomas Pynchon's literary career partly inspired by a close reading of the works of none other than Charles Fort? SD TUCKER seeks the pot of fortean gold at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Thomas Pynchon is America's most reclusive great writer since JD 'Don't Look At My Face!' Salinger, a man about whom so little is known that it is, paradoxically, possible to say just about anything about him without fear of being authoritatively contradicted. It is in this generously loose spirit that I propose the following speculative literary theory: that Thomas Pynchon is a hitherto unacknowledged disciple of Charles Fort.

Pynchon has a new book out, *Shadow Ticket*, which is implied to be his last, as the man is now 88. His best known novel remains his 1973 masterwork *Gravity's Rainbow*, a sprawling picaresque patchwork of WWII which features amongst its many protagonists the staff of something called 'The White Visitation', a quasi-paranormal branch of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), devoted towards formulating acts of deeply unconventional warfare. Based in a former mental asylum on the South Coast of England, it represents a safe-space where what Pynchon specifically calls "wild talents – clairvoyants and mad magicians, telekinetics, astral travellers, gatherers of light" can hold séances and work their wonders entirely free from government persecution, unlike poor old Helen Duncan being arrested for supposedly contacting the ghosts of dead sailors down in 1940s Portsmouth in direct contravention of the Official Secrets Act (**FT116:40-43, 372:38, 45, 445:18-21**).[1]

Seasoned *FT* readers will naturally have recognised the significance of those two little words "wild talents": *Wild Talents* being the name of Charles Fort's final, and perhaps best, book of fortean wonders. First published in New York in 1932, it is full of tall tales of talking dogs, spontaneous human combustion, and, most famously, Fort's well-known 'poltergeist girls', whom he imagines being recruited by the world's militaries to use their wild talents of psychokinesis against opposing nations' more conventional forces: "A squad of poltergeist girls … Girls at the front – and they are discussing their usual not very profound subjects. The alarm – the enemy is advancing. Command to the poltergeist girls to concentrate – and under their chairs they stick their wads of chewing gum. A regiment bursts into flames, and the soldiers are torches. Horses snort smoke from the combustion of their entrails. Reinforcements are smashed under cliffs that are teleported from the Rocky Mountains. The snatch of Niagara Falls – it pours upon the battlefield. The little poltergeist girls reach for their wads of chewing gum." [2] In the fantastic fictional world of Thomas Pynchon, such deadly teenagers would be gainfully employed working for The White Visitation and the SOE.

CREST BY ETIENNE GILFILLAN

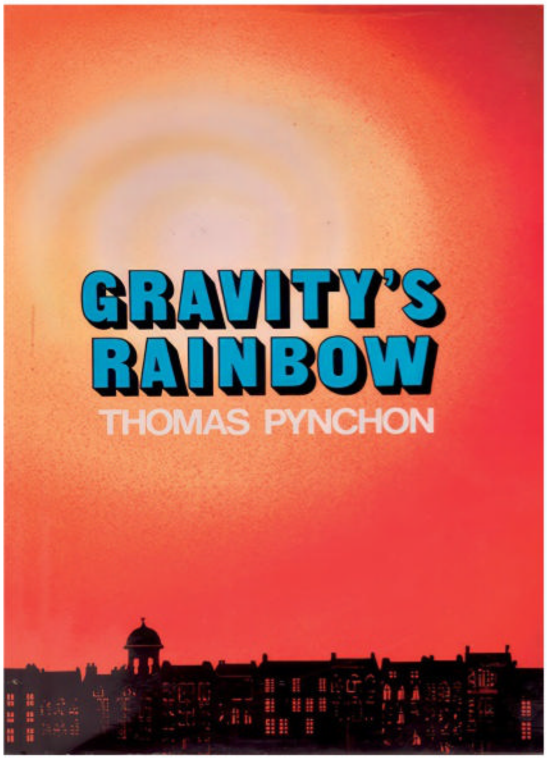
Is Pynchon's use of the specific phrase but a coincidence? In Fort's own well-known opinion, from Chapter Two of *Wild Talents*: "There is a view by which it can be shown … that there never has been a coincidence. That is, in anything like a final sense. By a coincidence is meant a false appearance, or suggestion, or relations among circumstances. But anybody who accepts that there is an underlying oneness of all things, accepts that there are no utter absences of relations among circumstances." [3]

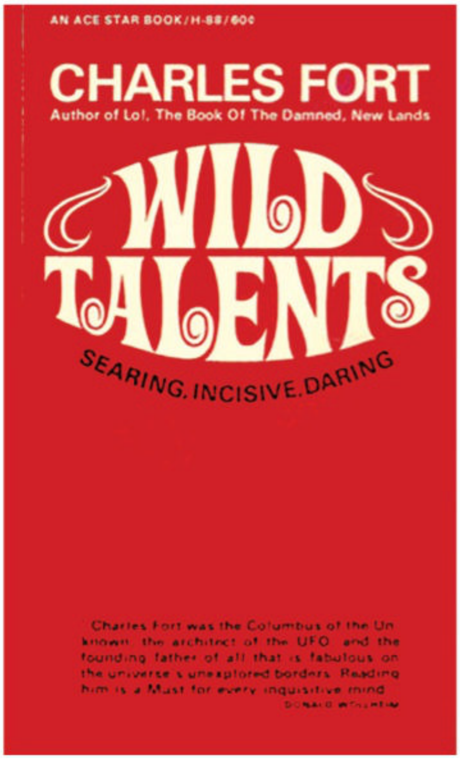
> *Pynchon's books do feature a lot of the kinds of things Fort wrote about*

By way of illustrating this somewhat Monist-tinged view, here's another funny coincidence. One of the most celebrated of lines from Fort's book is The Master's assertion that: "Science is a mutilated octopus. If its tentacles were not clipped to stumps, it would find its way into disturbing contacts."[4] One of the recurring characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*, meanwhile, is… yes, a mutilated octopus. An emotionally mutilated one named Grigori, that is, who has been abused by mad Behaviourist scientists via elaborate Pavlovian means until such a point as said cephalopod falls helplessly in love-n'-hatred with a beautiful female Dutch spy, attempting to sexually assault/kill her on a beach. "Did the girl swallow the octopus?" Fort asks elsewhere, in yet another discussion of synchronicities.[5] In this particular case, the octopus certainly tried his best to force her to do so.

Has anyone else ever noticed these "Kute Korrespondences", as Pynchon called such things in his novel? The only substantial example I can find is an essay titled *Wild Talents: Pynchon, Gaddis, and Charles Fort*, by a Pynchon scholar named Steven Moore; but not the same Steve Moore who was a central figure in the story of *FT* – that's just a coincidence.[6] According to Moore, it is perfectly possible – but, as always, conveniently unprovable – that Pynchon picked up a copy of *Wild Talents* in its mass-market 1968 Ace paperback edition, having read about Fort previously in *The Morning of the Magicians*, a classic esoteric text of the 1960s hippie counterculture generation, of whom Pynchon was something of a fellow traveller. Moore also notes Pynchon repeats the verbatim phrase "wild talents" a second time, in his 2013 novel *Bleeding Edge*. Furthermore, Pynchon's other books do feature an awful lot of the kinds of things Fort and his followers wrote about, like UFOs, ghosts, ley lines, the Hollow Earth, Spiritualism, and witches. Reading Pynchon, it is very obvious he knows *a lot* about the occult/paranormal, so put it this way: him not having at least heard of Charles Fort would be about as likely as Anne Rice never having at least heard of Bram Stoker.

What is *Gravity's Rainbow* about? It describes a comic and chaotic pan-European hunt for certain specific, and possibly wholly imaginary, components of the Nazi V-2 rocket, a bit like one of those classic old-time Hollywood comedy chase-films like *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, but one in which 90 per cent of the




AN ACE STAR BOOK/H-88/60¢
CHARLES FORT
Author of Lo!, The Book Of The Damned, New Lands
WILD TALENTS
SEARING. INCISIVE. DARING
Charles Fort was the Columbus of the Unknown, the architect of the UFO, and the founding father of all that is fabulous on the universe's unexplored borders. Reading him is a Must for every inquisitive mind

LEFT: Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* was published in 1973; had he read the 1968 edition of *Wild Talents*?

participants appear to be clinically disturbed. It has sometimes been compared with *Moby Dick*, but with a magic missile being hunted, not a giant white whale – if, indeed, *Moby Dick* itself is even really about hunting a giant white whale at all. There are innumerable characters, both human, paranormal and octopoid, but the main memorable protagonist is a humble but well-endowed black US GI named Tyrone Slothrop, whose massive penis appears to act as a kind of meat-based dowsing rod. Every time he gets an erection and beds a willing young Englishwoman, a V-2 rocket strikes the exact same location sometime later, leading The White Visitation to explore the tantalising possibility of utilising his genitalia as some kind of primitive early-warning system. The whole question then becomes: what's the causality here, if any? Is there even any such thing as causality at all? And this, of course, is also one of the main questions asked by Fort in his own body of work.

The genuine real-world V-2 rocket itself forces us to question what causality is. Being faster than sound, its explosion occurred first, before the noise of the rocket whistling in could even be perceived, making it both particularly deadly, and seemingly reverse-causal. Fort conceived of the Universe as one gigantic interconnected unity, within which nothing was quite separate – a Universe of the hyphen, as he liked to put it, not a Universe of the full stop – and the problem of where causality fits into such an existence is deep indeed. Fort asks where the Brooklyn Bridge ends, and where the rocky foundations underpinning it begin; likewise, thinkers like Descartes asked where body ended and mind began. So do students of psychokinesis and poltergeist girls. And, indeed, students of soldiers' erections and V-2 missiles. "Nature does not know extinction; it only knows transformation," the V-2's substantial inventor Wernher von Braun is cited as preaching on *Gravity's Rainbow*'s opening page. Sounds almost like another way of saying "One measures a circle beginning anywhere," another key quote of Fort's.

In Pynchon's novel, the Nazis too hold séances, attended by representatives of German chemicals giant IG Farben, in particular one Generaldirektor Smaragd. His name recalls that of the Smaragdene Tablet, or Emerald Tablet, of Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary foundational ur-text of alchemy, the supernatural science of transformations and transmutations, whose basic formula 'As above, so below', is recapitulated in the below-the-waist missile of Slothrop's erect penis, and the above-the-clouds penis of the equally rigid V-2 missile. The Nazi séances reveal the industrialists of IG Farben to be involved in an obscene parody of alchemy, abusing the one-ness of Fort's universe of the hyphen not to create living gold from the dead dross of leaden chemical reality, but to manufacture yet more death from dead matter instead – no eternal life-giving Philosopher's Stone emerged from the labs of IG Farben, just the killer gas of Zyklon B. The Nazis here are inspired by the prior (real-life) experience of chemist August Kekulé, who claimed to have had the ring-like structure of the benzene molecule revealed to him in a psychic dream when a circular snake eating its own tail in the shape of a ring – the age-old alchemical symbol of the ouroboros – had manifested. The implication being that this serpent was the very same one that had once offered Eve her apple, and later inspired German military chemists, contra Fort's words, to try measuring a polymer-ring circle beginning in the precise worst possible place.[7]

Intellectually speaking, some of the Allies are cut from the same cloth. Many SOE scientists cannot accept the implications of Slothrop's seemingly enchanted non-white Moby Dick, devising elaborate materialist pseudo-'explanations' for its V-2-magnetic properties, which seem even more unlikely than the original, paranormal-style ideas about causality the phenomenon seemingly embodies – not unlike Fort's 'phantom fishmonger', an imaginary seafood-distributing figure whom Fort mocked sceptics for implausibly invoking to 'explain' away miraculous falls of fish from the sky. Pynchon's phrase "Kute Korrespondences" appears designed to satirise such tendencies, the ironically irrational impulse of rationalists to impose neat, deterministic, cause-and-effect relationships onto our world; and so too do the books of Charles Fort. Is *Gravity's Rainbow*, then, nothing more than a fictionalised, narrative-based rewrite of Fort's own texts about real-life Slothrops with some apparent *Wild Talents* of their own? Or is my whole idea just another misguided Kute Korrespondence in itself?

NOTES

1 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, Vintage, 2000, p.46; Pynchon seemingly references the case of medium Helen Duncan being prosecuted under the Witchcraft Act without specifically naming her (p.39).

2 Charles Fort, *Wild Talents*, John Brown Publishing, 1998, p.178.

3 Fort, 1998, p.6.

4 Fort, 1998, pp.158-159.

5 Fort, 1998, p.4.

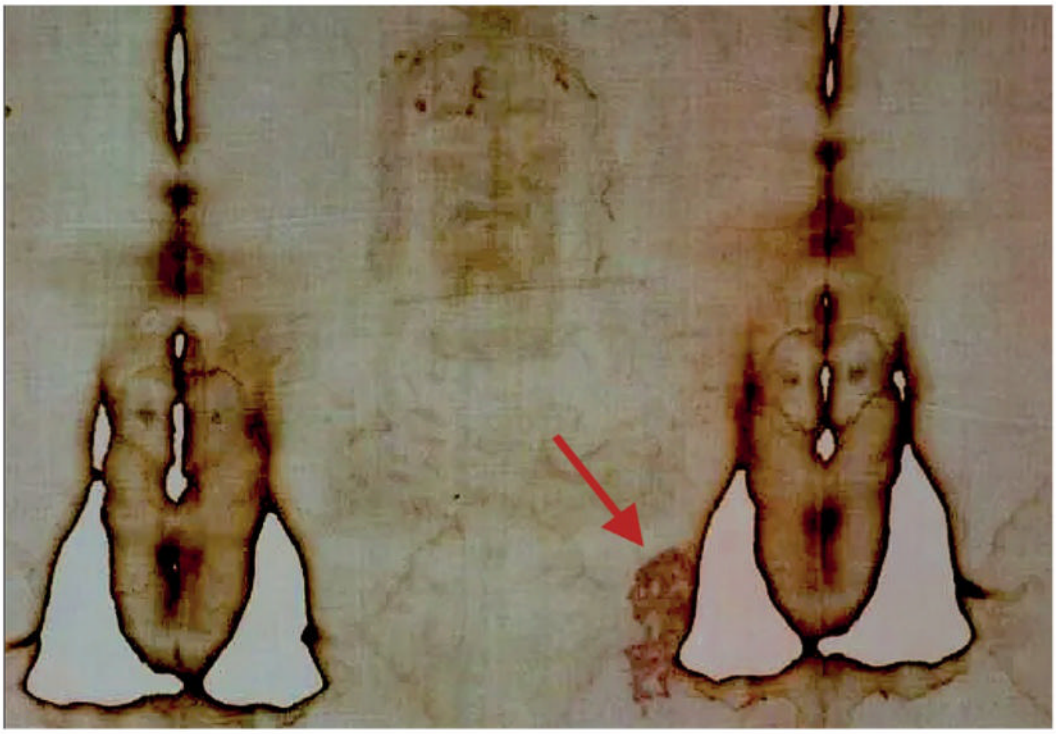
6 https://socratesonthebeach.com/steven-moore/; Steven Moore explicitly says he is "*not* the Steve Moore who in the 1990s edited the journal *Fortean Studies*", and the 'Gaddis' mentioned here isn't classic fortean writer Vincent H Gaddis either, but William Gaddis, a postmodern novelist with the same surname – yet another Kute Korrespondence.

7 Pynchon, 2000, pp.196-198, 487-488.

➾ **SD TUCKER** is a regular contributor to FT and the author of many books on weird science, Nazi UFOs and poltergeists.

The Washington Stain

Christ isn't the only figure visible on the Turin Shroud it would seem... but what is George Washington doing there, asks **JEFFREY VALLANCE.**



An uncanny stain has been identified on the Shroud of Turin – one that bears an uncanny resemblance to the most iconic image of US President George Washington (see "A Striking Likeness", **FT65:64**). The immediate question arises: What is Washington doing on the Shroud of Christ?

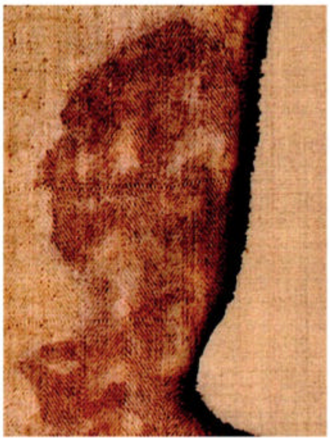
Some assert that this image serves as a prophetic symbol of the founding of God's Holy Nation – America. Among the pieces of supporting evidence is the striking similarity between the profile found on the Shroud and the portrait of Washington on the US. quarter. Even more compelling, the phrase *"In God We Trust"* appears alongside that image on the coin – perhaps an echo of divine sanction.

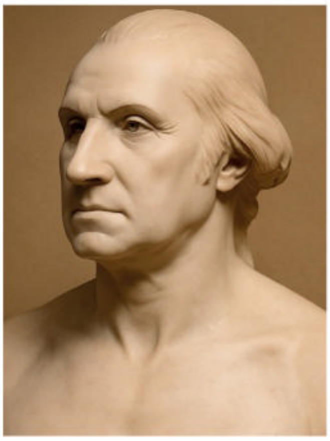
Sinologists (scholars of the Shroud) concede that, beyond the haunting imprint of the crucified Christ, numerous pareidolic images – visual patterns perceived as significant – have been documented. These include coins minted under Pontius Pilate placed over the eyes, phylacteries on the forehead, chin bindings, and even cryptic inscriptions. Intriguingly, burn marks from the 1532 fire that damaged the Shroud have produced additional "secondary images," including what some interpret as sinister, clown-like faces. The Washington profile, therefore, joins this catalogue of Shroud simulacra – an image of historical and perhaps spiritual resonance.

THE STAIN AND THE SPEAR

The Washington-like profile is said to have formed when the Roman centurion Gaius Cassius Longinus pierced Christ's side with the Holy Lance, entering above the sixth rib and puncturing His heart (**FT70:35-37**). The blood that poured forth from the wound eventually created this strange and evocative image. Anatomical comparisons between the Shroud stain and Washington's visage reveal uncanny parallels: the Roman nose, sloping forehead, sunken eyes, defined cheekbones, thin lips, and the characteristic dewlap beneath the chin. Even the colonial hairstyle, typical of Washington's era, is said to be preserved in the form. When the quarter's image is superimposed on the Shroud stain, the alignment is startlingly precise – this is Washington not as a young general, but as he appeared at the end of his life, a spectral death mask sealed in blood.

This is Washington at the end of his life, a death mask sealed in blood

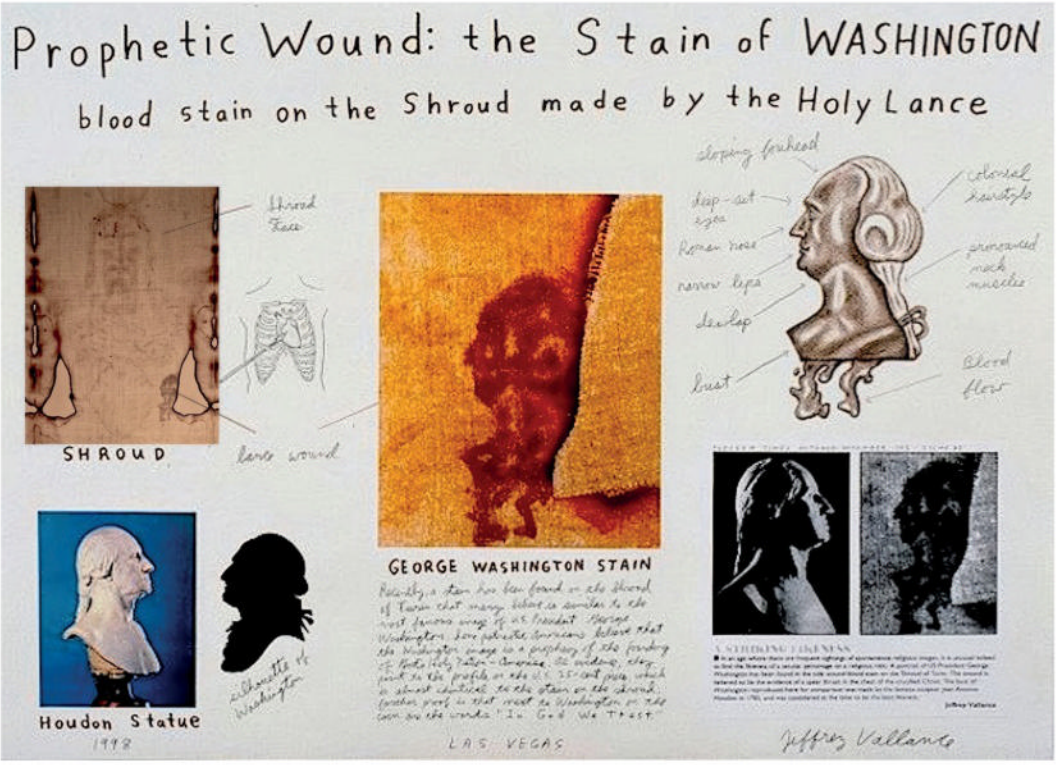




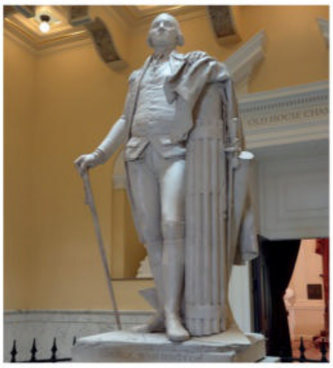
ABOVE: The location of the Washington Stain on the Shroud of Turin. **BELOW LEFT**: The likeness of Washington can be seen clearly. **BELOW RIGHT**: A bust of Washington by Jean-Antoine Houdon.

WASHINGTON AND LONGINUS: PARALLELS IN STONE

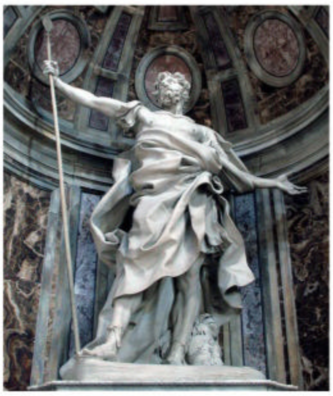
The image of George Washington that graces the US quarter is based on Jean-Antoine Houdon's celebrated sculpture, widely regarded as the most faithful likeness of the first president. Houdon's marble Washington, which stands in the Virginia State Capitol, captures the transformative moment after Washington stepped down from the presidency and returned to his plantation at Mount Vernon. With cloak


Prophetic Wound: the Stain of WASHINGTON
blood stain on the Shroud made by the Holy Lance
Shroud face
lance wound
SHROUD
sloping forehead
deep-set eyes
Roman nose
narrow lips
dewlap
bust
colonial hairstyle
pronounced neck muscles
Blood flow
GEORGE WASHINGTON STAIN
Recently, a stain has been found on the Shroud of Turin that many believe is similar to the most famous image of US President George Washington. Some patriotic Americans believe that the Washington image is a prophecy of the founding of God's Holy Nation – America. As evidence, they point to the profile on the U.S. 25-cent piece, which is almost identical to the stain on the shroud. Further proof is that next to Washington on the coin are the words "In God We Trust"
LAS VEGAS
Houdon Statue
1998
silhouette of Washington
A STRIKING LIKENESS
Jeffrey Vallance

JEFFREY VALLANCE



SUPERSHADOWP1AY/ WIKIMEIA COMMONS



JEAN-POL GRANDMONT

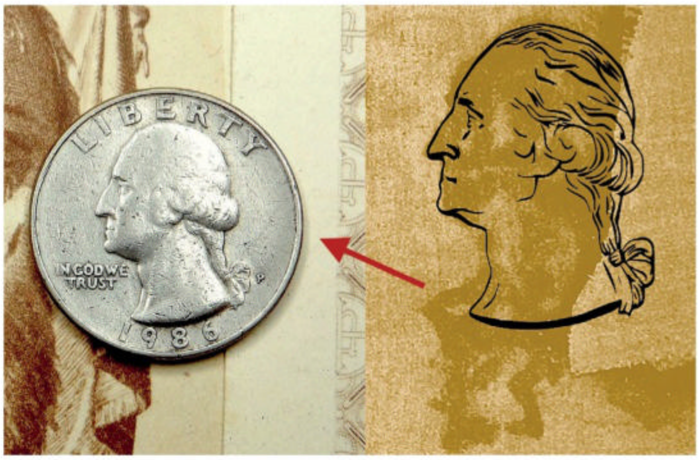
ABOVE LEFT: Jeffrey Vallance's diagram of the Washington Stain. **TOP RIGHT**: Houdon's famous statue of Washington in the Virginia State Capitol. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Bernini's 1628 statue of Longinus. **BELOW**: Recreating the Washington Stain. **BOTTOM**: The Washington Stain overlaid with the head of Washington from a US quarter.

cast aside and sword surrendered, Washington takes up his walking stick – a symbolic gesture echoing the Roman myth of Cincinnatus, who left his plough to save the Republic and then returned to it once peace was restored. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares…" (Isaiah 2:4). In his book *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment*, historian Garry Wills explores this powerful symbolism that connects Washington to his ancient Roman predecessor.

A parallel can be drawn to another sculpture: Gian Lorenzo Bernini's emotionally charged 1628 statue of Saint Longinus, housed in St Peter's Basilica. Bernini depicts the centurion at the precise moment of spiritual transformation – having pierced Christ's side, Longinus casts down his armour and gazes upward in awe, proclaiming: *"Truly, this man was the Son of God"* (Mark 15:39). The moment is immortalised not only in marble but also in Hollywood, with John Wayne portraying Longinus in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965).

Art historians such as Howard Hibbard suggest that Houdon's naturalistic style may have been directly inspired by Bernini's sculpture. Both statues reflect transitional moments: Longinus from pagan soldier to Christian saint, and Washington from warrior to peaceful citizen-farmer. One stands in a sacred Christian temple, the other in a secular American one – yet both are enshrined as symbols of moral and political virtue. Each figure discards the tools of war and takes up symbols of peace: the Holy Lance and the walking stick.

Notably, Washington's marble likeness – meticulously carved by Houdon – bears an eerie resemblance to the coagulated blood image found on the Shroud. It's as if the stain itself anticipated Houdon's work, or vice versa.


LIBERTY
IN GOD WE TRUST
1986

THE SACRED HÆMORRHAGE

And so the scenario unfolds, as fantastical as it is strange: Christ is crucified. Longinus pierces His side with the Holy Lance. Blood and pleural effusion gush forth. Amid this sacred hæmorrhage, an image coalesces – not merely related to the Messiah, but of an American founding father. The profile forms, transfers onto the Shroud, and remains for centuries – waiting to be interpreted.

Later, Jean-Antoine Houdon sculpts Washington's face, inspired by Bernini's Longinus. And somehow, across centuries and symbols, marble meets cloth, history touches myth, and the strange, blood-born face of George Washington stares back from the burial garment of Christ.

JEFFREY VALLANCE is an artist, writer, curator, explorer and paranormal experiencer. He has published over 10 books, including *Blinky the Friendly Hen* and *The Vallance Bible*.

The Ghastling

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folk horror, the macabre and the oh-so-strange. *For those that dwell in the darkness...*

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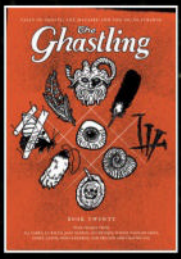
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Sceptical scientist and social worker

Paula Dempsey enjoys a study of a paranormal researcher whose concern was as much with those affected by psychic phenomena as it was about proving or disproving their existence

Chasing the Dark

Encounters with the Supernatural

Ben Machell

Abacus 2025

Hb, 304pp, £22, ISBN 9780349146829

Some ghost hunters acquire a little fame, or perhaps notoriety. Harry Price, for example, or any one of the many posting films of themselves screaming and running away on TikTok. *Chasing the Dark* takes us back to a time when investigating the paranormal wasn't mainstream and was a serious occupation. The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) had a network of members who actively looked into ghost cases; some were more sceptical than others.

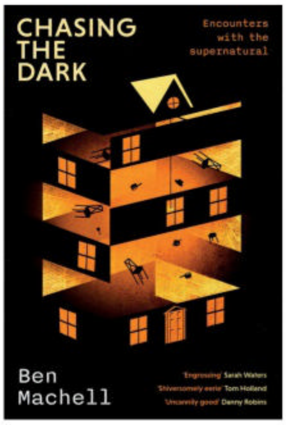
Tony Cornell was one of the sceptics, although this book gives one the sense that he'd have loved to have been proven wrong. He certainly experienced events he couldn't account for, notably when meeting an Indian holy man during World War II. This isn't simply a biography, as Machell deftly weaves Cornell's life story between accounts of significant events in the history of the paranormal and detailed descriptions of cases.

Chapter One describes a case where a family used a Ouija board to contact the spirit of their deceased cousin. Someone, or something, very different came through instead: a malevolent entity called Rupert.

The mother of the family said, sharply, to Cornell: "We have to get rid of it." Cornell reassured her. "We will," he said. "We will."

This interaction establishes Cornell's approach, and his character. His concern was as much with those affected by psychic phenomena as it was about proving the existence or otherwise of those phenomena. He was part sceptical scientist, part social worker. He would attend a case with a collection of useful tools – thread for putting across doors, for example, or an early electronic detection device, the Spider – but also spend time talking with the experiencers.

He often resolved hauntings by using psychological techniques. When the owners of an alleged haunted house wanted an exorcism, Cornell chose the room with the most supernatural activity, a bedroom, shut the door and lay on the bed for as long as it took to smoke a couple of cigarettes before emerging, rumpled as if after a long spiritual tussle, to announce that the spirit had gone. He also suggested the use of arcane rituals to dispel spirits; the inhabitants of that particular haunted house didn't realise he made them up himself.


CHASING THE DARK
Encounters with the supernatural
Ben Machell
'Engrossing' Sarah Waters
'Shiversomely eerie' Tom Holland
'Uncannily good' Danny Robins

His view on the famous Enfield poltergeist case was so different from investigators Maurice Grosse and Guy Lyon Playfair that the two men threatened him with legal action should he publish his opinion.

While Cornell was a sensible, calm and reassuring presence in situations involving distressed people and inexplicable incidents, his own life was far from calm. After two marriages ended in divorce he fell in love with an undergraduate at Cambridge, some years his junior, who attended regular meetings of his Cambridge University Society for Psychical Research. Alison was with him until his death. He appeared to be distant with his family, often away for several days together or out late at night on investigations.

> *"We have to get rid of it," she said. Cornell reassured her. "We will," he said. "We will."*

His relationship to paid work was equally problematic. After wartime service, Cornell scraped through his degree at Cambridge (he was undiagnosed with dyslexia) then worked as a sales representative for various companies, but one wonders how much time he gave to paid work.

In later life he made his money from renting out properties inherited from his father, which made it easier to devote even more time to his passion for ghosts. His relationship with long-time collaborator Alan Gauld is also explored.

Machell's book skips nimbly back and forth, from Cornell's life to the history of paranormal research. The author traces its roots from the Spiritualism of the Fox sisters in 19th-century New York State through the founding of the SPR, to the 1970s, where the superpowers explored remote viewing for defence purposes and celebrity psychics Uri Geller and Matthew Manning were as comfortable on talk shows as they were in the laboratory or the séance room.

This history puts Cornell's investigations into context and Machell has a talent for taking the reader off on fascinating tangents before returning them safely to the main story.

And the history is relevant. Cornell visited the Soviet Union in 1962 to meet Russian parapsychologists. He reported back that they firmly believed in telepathy but were less certain about psychokinesis. Additionally, he noted their strictly materialistic approach, devoid of any spiritual or religious context.

It is suggested that Cornell's wartime service may have led to him doing investigations for the British Government while he was there, but there's no firm evidence.

For readers less interested in the history and methods of psychical research there are some wonderful ghost stories too. Cornell had more than his fair share of poltergeist cases and of run-ins with mediums. He was both genuinely open-minded and ready to test claims to the utmost, never afraid to challenge or debunk.

The book ends with interviews with people working in the field now, including Parascience's Steve Parsons and writer and broadcaster Kate Cherrell. Both are concerned about the quality of current research, particularly by those more concerned about their social media profile.

Machell's book gives a real sense of what Cornell was like, and of both the excitement and the mindless tedium of psychical research in the latter half of the 20th century. I recommend this book to anyone who wishes to become better acquainted with this extraordinary man.

★★★★★

The fortean side of coins

Paul Sieveking discovers fascinating details about numismatic myths, monsters and more

Treasures of the Occult

A Guide to History's Unorthodox Money

Dominic Chorney

Stanley Gibbons Baldwin's 2025

Hb, 230pp, £34.95, ISBN 9781836884774. Available from baldwin.co.uk or at 399 Strand, London WC2R OLX

I have been a keen numismatist since 1958, but this is the first publication about the fortean side of the subject as far as I am aware. The chapters cover Myths and Monsters, Magic, Unidentified Objects, Conspiracies, Hoaxes and Secret Societies, and Death.

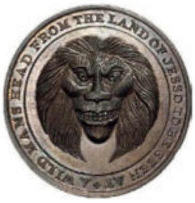
Since the advent of coinage about 26 centuries ago, coins and treasure have been associated with unusual events like comets, frightening creatures and magic. Coins have long been thrown into wells and springs as offerings to the gods and ghost stories have emerged around these sacred waters.

DOMINIC CHORNEY
TREASURES OF THE
OCCULT
A guide to history's unorthodox money

Water monsters have featured on coins since the time of the Ancient Greeks, such as the Ketos, an enormous sea serpent as big as a ship. It is often depicted on coins with a vicious tooth-filled mouth and a large tail, particularly on the beautiful coins of Syracuse. According to the geographer Pliny the Elder, every animal has its marine counterpart. He claimed the skeleton of a Ketos once washed up on the shores of Judea, and was put on public display in Rome.

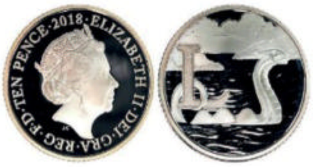
Sirens and harpies featured on coins, and the winged horse Pegasus, and all sorts of sea monsters featured on early maps, and on coins and medals of European royalty. There are medals of Philip II of Spain and Manuel, king of Portugal, riding sea monsters.

In 2018, Nessie with humps featured on a 10 pence UK coin, with a mintage of only 304,000. In 1529 prospectors in the Harz mountains of central Germany encountered and shot a "wildman", whose home was allegedly atop a huge quantity of silver ore, though the absence of any remains casts doubt on this story. European wildmen (or wodewoses) often featured on coinage, such as German thalers of the 16th century, frequently wielding a club or large tree.



A London halfpenny issued by antiquities dealer Richard Summers in 1797 has a grotesque portrait of a wildman and the inscription: "A Wildman's Head from the Land of Jesso to be seen at Summer's Museum No 24 Old Cavendish Street Oxford Street." Jesso might refer to present-day Hokkaido in Japan; Japanese culture has a rich selection of *Yokai* or folk monsters. The creature depicted on the coin might be the Hibagon, a beast around five feet tall, covered in spiky hair, and with glaring eyes; or maybe it's just a macaque monkey.

Of all the mythical beasts to be found on coins, dragons are the most plentiful. Dragons appear on many Celtic coins and we see St Michael killing the dragon on the gold angels of Edward IV and subsequent reigns, and St George spearing a dragon on the George Noble of Henry VIII.



Most famously, we see St George killing the dragon on the iconic design by Benedetto Pistrucci on gold sovereigns from 1817 (George III) to the present day.

This is an elegant and informative book that covers a neglected aspect of numismatics, and should appeal to fans of mystery and symbolism.

★★★★★

How Animals Heal Us

Jay Griffiths

Hamish Hamilton 2025

Hb, 384pp, £20, ISBN 9780241614358

Humans will not be properly alive, declared Hildegard of Bingen, unless animals blow on us.

That is the thesis of this extraordinary, learned, lyrical, heartbreaking and heart-making survey of the emotional, sensory, political and moral lives of animals and their entanglement with us.

Griffiths, whose previous books include *Wild*, *Pip Pip* and *Kith*, concludes that "If I want a shot of instant healing, I can find a donkey … If I learn of someone suicidal, I would not only try to get them human help but I would also try to get a dog to them as a matter of the utmost urgency … I've learned to listen to the guiding voices of animals warning us of danger and showing us remedies." When she hears bees buzzing, she hears medicine. When she sees a spider she wonders what it dreamt last night.

Griffiths is a natural poet, but this is poetry rooted in the scientific literature and in diligent reportage. Animals are very special to us. We are intimately connected to them, as every pet-owner knows. It's not surprising, given our hunter-gatherer constitution. But the connection isn't just a feeling or a metaphor: it is physiologically demonstrable. We're hardwired for relationship with animals. When we see animals, our right amygdala lights up. It doesn't do that for other humans. When dogs look at us, they automatically focus on the right-hand side of our face – the side that is most emotionally eloquent. They don't do that for other animals. They want to know what we are feeling; their own stress hormones rise when they hear a human crying, and they want to do something about our hurt. A lick, a look or a paw can work wonders. Stroking a dog can reduce heart rate, blood pressure and anxiety. Sometimes their assistance is more dramatic. Griffiths tells us of a dog who dunked a towel in the toilet and brought it to his badly injured owner, saving him from death by dehydration in the heat of the Australian summer.

Dogs, of course, have evolved to be our helpers. It's hard to know where a dog ends and the owner begins. But it's not just dogs who help us. Griffiths calls a host of witnesses. She tells us about the parrot who raised the alarm when a child was choking, screaming, "Mama! Baby!"; about the Ethiopian girl kidnapped by traffickers and rescued by three lions who guarded her until the police and her relatives arrived; about the humpback whale who lifted a diver onto his head to save her from a tiger shark. We hear how animals diagnose infections, cancer and many other maladies with apparently clairvoyant skill, and how they can be our moral and political tutors, healing the body politic as well as the physical body. It's an enthralling and important read.

jay griffiths
how
animals
heal
us

Charles Foster

★★★★★

Silence of the Gods

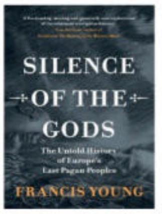
The Untold History of Europe's Last Pagan Peoples

Francis Young

Cambridge University Press 2025

Hb, 456pp, £25, ISBN 9781009586573

During the late Middle Ages and early modern period, Christianity completed its spread across Europe, converting the last pagan populations in the Baltic region, parts of Scandinavia and the Volga-Ural region, whose previous pagan beliefs survive today only in folk practices and syncretic additions to Christianity. This, at least, is the popular view of this transition (insofar as there is a "popular" view of Christianisation in the early modern Baltic), although historians of religion have long recognised a much more complex story of interaction between different religious communities.



In *Silence of the Gods*, Francis Young looks at the process of Christianisation and religious interaction in a wide range of pagan communities in late mediæval and early modern Europe, discussing not only the ways in which these cultures changed and adapted

to Christianity – or didn't – but also the ways in which Christian thought about pagan cultures changed and varied. Young addresses many different regions and polities, including Prussia; the Sámi people of Scandinavia; the pagan cultures of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; the Chuvash, Udmurt, Mari and Mordvin peoples of what is today Russia, and more. Each chapter covers a century, starting in the 15th and ending in the 19th, so that each is more focused on broader attitudes toward paganism and Christianisation rather than a particular area.

Although the structure of the book can make the history of an individual community a little complicated to follow, it conveys one of Young's main points, which is the tremendous variety and complexity of interactions between paganism and Christianity. Not only does "paganism" encompass a wide range of different beliefs and practices, changing over time and varying even across relatively short distances, but Christian authorities have a range of different responses to communities with non-Christian or "Christianesque" practices. These communities could be seen as novice Christians in need of religious education, as witches practising magic rather than religion, as adherents of a rival belief system, and so on.

The picture that emerges of the relationship between pre-Christian, Christian and partly or completely Christianised communities is complex and varied. Throughout, Young emphasises the agency of cultures who neither stubbornly resisted Christianisation nor passively accepted Christian teachings, but instead incorporated Christian symbols and concepts into new systems of belief and practice that responded to the ever-changing world around them.

Silence of the Gods is a fascinating example of the real complexities of Christianisation in regions where sources can be limited. Readers with some background in the history of the regions covered will get a little more out of it, but it's worth investigating for anyone with an interest in the history of European paganism and Christianisation.

James Holloway

★★★★

Haunted States

An American Gothic Guidebook

Miranda Corcoran

Repeater Books 2024

Pb, 352pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781914420320

Two myths compete for the soul of America. One sees the nation as the exemplar of pragmatism, progress, rationalism and righteousness, the place where history comes to die. The other perceives the country as doused in moral ambiguity, secrecy and self-deception, a place where the past festers and unnerves. *Haunted States* puts this second America on display.

Miranda Corcoran's pilgrimage through US psychic and spiritual hotspots reveals a country where Old World phantoms and monsters find afterlives and New World crimes and horrors expose an uncanny and uncoveted species of American exceptionalism.

Corcoran, a self-confessed sceptic, is an Irish literary scholar and cultural historian fascinated with America off the beaten path. References to US fiction and film – from Lovecraft and Zora Neale Hurston to chain-saw and big-bug movies – enrich her empathetic account of the American gothic and grotesque.

She begins her exploration of the nation's mystic geography between the Misty Dog Grill and the Twist O' the Mist ice-cream shack in upstate New York, not far from Lily Dale, summer Mecca for thousands of Spiritualists. Her three-month journey ends at the Dibble House in rural Iowa, backdrop to Grant Wood's most parodied painting, long famous for making the pitchfork the choice emblem of heartland, homey and creepy.

Along the way, often slow-motion due to her penchant for travel by foot, ferry, bicycle and bus, Corcoran's informants include true believers, hotel clerks, museum curators, self-appointed local experts and the occasional taciturn stranger, requisite for any freaky story.

Corcoran's route takes her from New York and New England, down the Atlantic coast, to Florida and the Gulf states, westward through Texas and New Mexico, and then back east from San Francisco through Denver and the fly-over prairie. Forgotten graveyards, noxious bayous, dog-eared houses and towns, forlorn execution grounds and former slave markets are her prime destinations. Memorable stops include witch-obsessed Salem, Shirley Jackson's "Bennington Triangle", the Poe Museum with its feline hang-abouts, the Big Easy's St Roch Cemetery, atomic Los Alamos and California's Forest Lawn Memorial Park, the "Disneyland of Death".

Sadly, Corcoran's interest in repressed memories of Indian removal and slavery does not materialise in visits to Wounded Knee or any Confederate attic or cross-burning site. She ignores America's favourite ghost, the "holy" one of Flannery O'Connor's "Christ-haunted" Deep South.

But if the US is truly one "immense haunted house", any creaky door should yield access to the whole. Corcoran's pilgrim record, exquisitely narrated, is enhanced with map and illustrations but no index. It is spook show, cautionary tale and homage to the quirky, spiced with a pinch of Freud and Derrida – a witness to the other America, whose swampy soul remains captive to the unquietly dead.

Peter A Huff

★★★★★

The Life and Death of John Yarker

David Harrison

Lewis Masonic 2025

Pb, 352pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780853186663

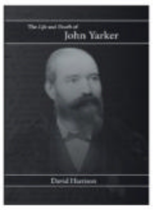
The first full-length biography of esoteric Freemason John Yarker, this is also a valuable addition to the study of Victorian esotericism. Of lower-middle class origins, Yarker was employed in Manchester's cotton industry as a clerk, and initiated to Craft Masonry in 1854, aged 21. His resignation less than 10 years later was ostensibly motivated by financial constraints – Yarker was a married man with six children, and the American Civil War had a deleterious effect upon Lancashire's cotton trade.

But reading between the lines, Harrison suggests disillusionment with the Craft was also a factor: "English Freemasonry has lost its way," Yarker argued, its esoteric origins in Classical mystery schools forgotten. Further: "Freemasonry is a sad remnant of what once had been," whose members were "more interested in rank than the study of the real arcane mysteries".

Yarker was no stranger to the arcane, exploring crystal scrying, clairvoyance, Martinism, magnetism, Spiritualism, the study of Eastern religions and more besides. Helena Blavatsky, Theodor Reuss (head of Ordo Templi Orientis, then based in Germany), and a certain A Crowley were among his correspondents. There is strong evidence that Yarker's Antient and Primitive Rite of Masonry (Rite of Memphis) influenced the development of OTO after Reuss had appointed Crowley its head.

Having been disappointed by what he perceived as a lack of esoteric study and practice in Craft Freemasonry, Yarker set about redressing the balance by establishing or reviving a prodigious number of orders, and publishing numerous research papers. Perhaps the most significant and enduring order with which Yarker was associated is the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRIA), still going since its 1867 inception, dedicated to "spiritual, philosophical and ethical truths", whose members have presented papers on subjects that include alchemy, AI, number symbolism and shamanism.

Harrison is to be commended for his depth of research, having unearthed a substantial amount of contemporary publications, documents, letters, photographs and esoteric diagrams, many of which are reproduced herein. A valuable addition to masonic historiography, his book is also of great value as a study of the 19th-century occult revival. Victorian Britain's occult researchers and practitioners invariably used Freemasonry or masonic-style orders as a respectable cover, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was by no means the only game in town.



Christopher Josiffe

★★★★★

A plethora of UFO titles

David Clarke examines three very different studies of unidentified aerial phenomena, from the coffee-table macro to the single-county micro

Atlas of Unidentified Flying Objects

and Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena

Andy McGrillen

Ivy Press 2025
Hb, 224pp, £20, ISBN 9781836006022

UFOs over Britain

Neil R Storey

Amberley Publishing 2025
Pb, 160pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781398120280

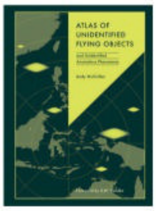
Devon's Mysterious Aerial Phenomena

Volumes 1-3

Robin Coysh

Amazon 2025
Pb, 180pp, £9.50, ISBN 9798285231257
Pb, 209pp, £10, ISBN 9798285623120
Pb, 146pp, £9, ISBN 9798266464032

The most recent revival of interest in UFOs has largely taken place online, via social media and platforms such as YouTube, podcasts and the blogosphere. How things have changed since the last revival in 1996-97, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of ufology, that saw a deluge of printed matter from short-lived 'zines to books, TV programmes and films. Today the market for books on UFOs is dead, with the "myths and mysteries" sections of bookshops packed with titles on witchcraft and ghosts.



Given the short attention span of the new breed of UFO consumers, how ironic that one of the most prolific of the new kids on the block, Andy McGrillen, host and creator of That UFO Podcast (11 million audio downloads in five years and almost two million YouTube views), should venture into old-fashioned print via a coffee-table sized illustrated book that revisits key world UFO legends in a lavishly illustrated atlas format.

But does the procession of celebrity guests and discussions about the latest breakthroughs satisfy his audience? And does this book add anything to existing knowledge about well-known legends such as the Belgian wave, the Betty and Barney Hill abduction, the Broad Haven flap or Roswell? The answer to both questions is no, but McGrillen deserves credit for his attempt to move the debate offline to those who might wish to examine these stories in more detail.

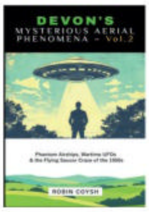
Inquiring minds might struggle with the book, because few references to more in-depth studies are provided and anyone seeking sceptical viewpoints will be disappointed. McGrillen is clearly wedded to the extraterrestrial explanation for puzzling incidents like the Rendlesham Forest UFOs. The only way forward is disclosure as we "as a species are getting ever closer to being told" that we are not alone. A little historical research would have informed him that folks have been saying this since at least 1950.

In contrast to McGrillen's international sweep, Neil Storey's attempt to capture the British experience of UFO visitations carefully avoids making any comment on the potential source of mysterious lights and objects seen in the sky.

Starting with the phantom airship flaps of 1909 and 1913 and ending with the Pentyrch Incident of 2016, his book briefly summarises many of the key incidents chronologically, from the foo fighters of WWII to the flaps of more recent decades. *UFOs over Britain* is just an annotated list of UFO stories cobbled together from newspaper cuttings, magazine articles and online scraping. There is little critical analysis of the stories themselves and the author says he "tries not to get embroiled in conspiracy theories". If you enjoy reading about "fast bright lights" seen over the East Coast in 1952 you might enjoy this, but by the end you might be crying out for a few conspiracy theories to lighten the tedium.

In contrast again, the three-volume, self-published collection of Devon's mysterious aerial phenomena by Robin Coysh provides a much more satisfying meal from a fortean perspective. Coysh has clearly put time and effort into his archive research that focused on strange aerial apparitions appearing in just one county in southwest England that has a rich tradition. Whereas McGrillen's book looks at the phenomenon from a macro level, Coysh provides a microcosmic perspective that opens up alternative perspectives, whilst remaining open-minded towards the extraterrestrial hypothesis.

His survey of written records produced so much material that he was obliged to split his collection into three volumes. The first covers will o'the wisps, fiery dragons and other luminous apparitions from the folklore of Devonshire. The second volume tackles the phantom airship flaps, wartime UFOs and the craze for seeing flying saucers that arrived in Britain during the early 1950s. Oddly his account of the famous "flying cross" incident of 1967, when police officers chased a UFO across Dartmoor, is dealt with in the first book, but that leaves space for Coysh to tackle the complex story of George King and the origins of the Aetherius Society in the second. A final slim book includes a history of ball lightning, earthlights and other strange meteorological phenomena, including the fireball that destroyed the church spire at Widecombe-in-the-Moor in 1638.



Of the three titles, Coysh's collection has my stamp of approval.

McGrillen ★★
Storey ★★
Coysh ★★★

Time Expansion Experiences

The Psychology of Time Perception and the Illusion of Linear Time

Steve Taylor

Watkins 2024
Pb, £14.99, 304pp, ISBN 9781786788467

The author's experience of a car crash in which time seemed to slow down sparked his interest as a psychologist. Here was a phenomenon in which, despite its life-threatening context, at least 83 per cent of respondents reported feelings of calm, clarity and serenity. But why is there such variability in our subjective perception of the way and speed in which time seems to pass?

Taylor focuses on the essence of what experts have discovered. He covers a lot of ground in chapters on the experiences of sporting types; the "meditation" methods of various spiritual and religious disciplines; and mind-altering psychotropics. He branches out into near-death experiences and the related "life review"; the time-transcendence of precognition and prophecy; and even the spontaneous "illumination" experience that can suddenly overwhelm one in the presence of beauty, serenity or awe. His thoughts on orthodox theories of perception and of consciousness itself form the focus of his final chapters, ending with a review of the physical and perceptual conundrums presented by the direct observation of quantum processes.

Is it all an illusion? Can it be explained at all? If Taylor has an answer, it is, unfortunately, underwhelming as he wanders off into familiar messages of taking more care of our own wellbeing, being more altruistic, considerate, even spiritual. Focusing on moments such as these will result in time slowing down, he states, yielding more time for stressless involvement. That said, he writes and explains well, and his summaries of the various debates are worth reading for comparison with others. Basically, what you experience is all up to you … but then you probably knew that already.

Bob Rickard

★★

THE HAUNTED GENERATION

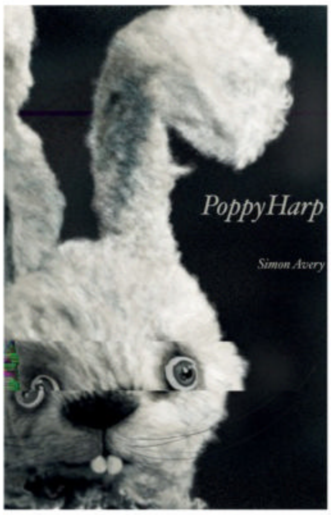
BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY

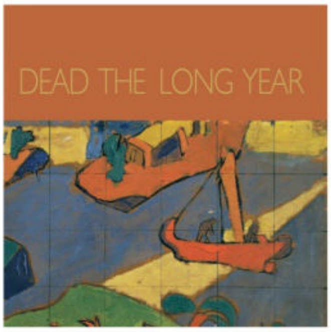
"I spotted some marionettes in a dusty old window in the Cotswolds," explains writer Simon Avery. "And they were arranged in a tableau that suggested the spectres of the 1970s and 1980s to me. Sepia-tinted memories of *Bagpuss* and *Fingerbobs*, the decidedly less benign Hartley Hare of *Pipkins*, and Jan Švankmajer's *Alice*." Simon's chance encounter became the starting point for his affecting novel *PoppyHarp*. Taking further inspiration from the autobiography of Oliver Postgate and the published diaries of Kenneth Williams, Simon tells the story of a reclusive children's TV pioneer, Oliver Frayling, whose gradual retreat from the world has a profound affect on both his daughter Imogen and her on-off partner Noah. As does the realisation that Oliver's most famous creation, a flea-bitten stop-motion rabbit called Florian, has manifested in the real world and is attempting to lead Noah's daughter Lily to "Elsewhere", a mysterious realm accessed from tiny doors hidden behind bedroom wardrobes.

And PoppyHarp himself? An imaginary childhood friend who becomes the titular inspiration for Oliver Frayling's final tilt at TV success: a 1977 *Play For Today*. "I've always been fascinated by imaginary friends," says Simon. "And PoppyHarp is deeply woven into the characters' lives long before they even realise it – in their lonely creativity and their struggles with the truth of their lives."

Those truths include loneliness and the tragic impact of the 1980s AIDS crisis, and Simon's novel is a touching evocation of a complex time in British social history. It's available now from Black Shuck Books.

Chimehours
"Underneath the Earth"





Sister IRENE O'CONNOR
fire
of GOD's LOVE

Maps
Welcome to the Tudor Gate

Meanwhile, Beck Goldsmith and John Dix have been enjoying Max Porter's acclaimed 2019 novel *Lanny*, the tale of a missing young boy and his connection to a folkloric sprite called Dead Papa Toothwort. Inspired by their own candlelit readings, the duo – in their musical guise as Chimehours – have crafted *Underneath the Earth*, a tribute album riddled with suitably creepy folk stylings. "We wanted to capture the sense of something calling to us," explains Beck. "An 'otherness' that exists just outside of what we know". Weaving dreampop guitars around Beck's own haunting vocals, it's hidden beneath the tree fungus at coldspring.bandcamp.com.

Elsewhere, excitingly, two lost artefacts have resurfaced. In 1978, John Hurt starred as electronic musician Anthony Fielding in *The Shout*, a bizarre British horror film in which baleful drifter Alan Bates claims to have perfected a deadly yodel with the power to kill. Fielding's alarming compositions were provided for the film by Rupert Hine – later to find chart success as Quantum Jump – and have now gained a first-ever commercial release over at buriedtreasure.bandcamp.com. And for a more ecclesiastical brand of vintage oddness, I recommend *Fire of God's Love*, an extraordinary record of religious songs recorded in 1973 by Australian nun Sister Irene O'Connor. Her co-producer Sister Marimil Lobregat had cultivated an unlikely fascination with early synths and drum machines, lending Sister Irene's folk-influenced songs a distinctly otherworldly quality, and the album is available for the first time in 50 years from freedomtospend.org.

Other slabs of strangeness drifting through the ether? Drew Mulholland's album *A Portmanteau of Horrors* is a terrific homage to the era of Amicus anthology films, combining spooky sound collages with Radiophonic swoops, and it's available from subexoticrecords.bandcamp.com. And feeling similarly cinematic is James 'Maps' Chapman, whose new record *Welcome to the Tudor Gate* is a pristine evocation of 1980s horror soundtracks – in his own words, "a foreboding land where magic is real and witchcraft is feared". Feel free to indulge in a bit of the old hubble bubble at mapsmute.bandcamp.com.

Anyone still in the mood for a holiday tipple, though? Using only the power of absinthe, writer Justin Hopper has travelled back to 1912 and London's real-life occult-fuelled nitespot The Cave of the Golden Calf. Aleister Crowley and Victor Neuburg were regulars, but Justin's superb, lyrical novella *Dead the Long Year* focuses on Joan Hayes, a youthful ingenue drawn into this dangerously bohemian circle.

"Joan was a young actress, dancer and suffragette who seems to have beguiled everyone she met," says Justin. "Ezra Pound wrote two poems about her – including 'Ione, Dead the Long Year', from which the book takes its title. Although she was despised by Crowley, who thought she'd stolen Victor from him."

A fictionalised version of Justin also makes an appearance in the book. Linked to Joan by an antique pistol he buys online, he seeks her resonance in the modern-day absinthe bar now standing on the site of the Cave. "I wanted to write a full biography of Joan, but there wasn't enough information," continues Justin. "And I also wanted to write about both the power and the limits of psychogeography. I find its methods and concepts to be charged with a thrilling energy, but I feel jaded by that very same routine. So how do we rediscover the true magick inside these artforms, escaping their clichés while gaining power from their traditions? I guess I combined them into a mere 19,000 words!" *Dead the Long Year* is published by Far West Press, but this column takes no responsibility for any further festive experiments with the Green Fairy. Which reminds me, I still have the Christmas washing-up to do…

Visit the Haunted Generation website at www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk. Send details of new releases to hauntedgeneration@gmail.com

REVIEWS / FILMS

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Dreams within dreams

A weird coming of age drama, a noirish psychological horror and an Indonesian metafiction

Alpha

Dir Julia Ducournao, France/Belgium, 2025
On digital platforms

As the daughter of a gynæcologist and a dermatologist, it was perhaps inevitable that French screenwriter/director Julia Ducournao would align herself to what is loosely termed body horror. Her first feature film, the 2016 cannibal flick *Raw*, was so horrific it reportedly had audience members at the Toronto Film Festival fainting in the aisles. That was followed in 2021 by *Titane*, about a girl with a titanium plate in her head who becomes a murderous model with a car fetish, which is, and will probably remain, one of the very few movies where the main protagonist has sex with a fire engine. All this led up to *Alpha*, Ducournao's third feature film. It is neither as grisly as *Raw*, nor as gloriously weird as *Titane*, but has elements of both, along with the coming of age/rite of passage thread so prevalent in her work.

Alpha is a 13-year old girl (played by newbie Melissa Boros) who, in a rebellious moment, allows herself to be tattooed at a party. When her doting mother (Golshifteh Farahani) finds out, she hits the roof; which is understandable given that the hospital where she works is currently being overwhelmed by sufferers of a bizarre new disease that slowly turns people into marble. Mum is convinced Alpha has been infected, along with her drug addict brother Amin (Tahar Rahim, who won plaudits for his portrayal of French serial killer Charles Sobhraj in the miniseries *The Serpent*), who has come to live with them after his release from prison. The disease, known only as 'The Red Wind', and the accompanying social panic, has obviously been heavily inspired by both Covid and the AIDS epidemic, but isn't actually as scary as either. I am sure turning to stone has some deep metaphorical significance here, but this is barely explored. Neither are the disease's origins or any other details that might have made the threat more realistic. Sometimes ambiguity helps storytelling, other times it hinders it – and here there are just too many unanswered questions. When Alpha's classmates discover she might have been infected by a dirty needle (another leap, because the mode of transmission was never addressed), they subject her to the kind of *Carrie*-level torment and discrimination only hormone-driven teenagers are capable of. This has the dual effect of alienating Alpha from her peers and driving her closer to her infected, drug-addled uncle.

> *I am sure turning to stone has some deep metaphorical significance*

Alpha is a very emotional, immersive piece of work, and there is a lot to admire. The sense of dread builds almost palpably throughout as it meanders its way toward a heady climax, dwelling perhaps a bit too much en route on Amin's self-destructive tendencies and Alpha's mother's desperate fight on two fronts to keep her family intact. However, that promised climax never comes. The ending is initially predictable and unsatisfying, and then becomes confusing as timelines are relentlessly twisted and characters transplanted from one setting to another. This technique harks back to an Edgar Allan Poe quote earlier in the film ("All that we say or seem is but a dream within a dream") – which provides some context, but does little to help the audience understand anything. Fans of Ducournao, and there are many, will undoubtedly hail *Alpha* as her latest masterpiece, but it is unlikely to win her many new ones.

Chris Saunders

★★★☆☆

A Desert

Dir Joshua Erkman, USA 2024
On digital platforms

There's a line in *Hamlet* spoken by Polonius in which he describes the acting troupe who have just arrived at Court. He describes them as "The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral." So, to describe A Desert as a neo-noir-psychological-horror is simply continuing a dramatic tradition that is well established. Unfortunately, without the Bard himself in charge of the script, this film falls well short of *Hamlet*.

It starts off with a rather dim-witted fellow called Alex (Kai Lennox), who is on the road in the western USA trying to gather inspiration for his next photographic album. He gets mixed up with a somewhat crazed young man, Renny (Zachary Ray Sherman) and his femme fatale sister, Susie Q (Ashley Smith), after they invite themselves into his motel room. He wakes up the following morning with a monster hangover and some wrecked equipment, with no memory of the night before. So far, so noir.

From this point on it's not possible to talk about the story any further, because to do so would be to reveal the twists and turns which make this film an intriguing, if uncomfortable, watch. However, on this occasion the publicity people are right to describe it as a neo-noir-psychological-horror, because while it's mainly the former, my goodness, there is plenty of the latter towards the end. One might also throw in detective thriller, as there are not one but two PIs involved

More than anything the film reminded me of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, at least structurally: a 'hero' who checks into a motel and disappears about half an hour in; a rather slovenly detective who is engaged to find him; and of course, the big finish.

Unlike Hitch, director Erkman doesn't quite have control of the pacing or tone of his film. Rather than blending genres he lurches from one to another to another in a mechanical way. Half an hour of noir, then half an hour of detecting, and so on. It's not easy to do. For instance, I maintain that among all the cinematic attempts at horror-comedy there has only ever been one which is

TELEVISION

FT's couch potatoes, STU NEVILLE & RUTH MORRIS assess the small screen's current fortean offerings

Following last year's solo jaunt across the UK, Charlie Cooper is back… This time accompanied by his big sister, Daisy May. *Daisy May and Charlie Cooper's Nightwatch* sees the squabbling siblings embarking upon a nationwide tour of celebrated haunted locations. Their siblinghood is reinforced by a *Birds of a Feather* style montage as the opening titles roll; how touching.

The first episode sees the duo arrive at Gloucester Prison, where the anomalies immediately become apparent with both the mystery of the disappearing mobile phone (in one scene it's proudly mounted on the dashboard, in the next they remark on their lack of mobile phones) and the apporting fluffy pink unicorn. After the customary cold, dark, echoey tour of the prison, the pair are shown to their cell and left alone for the night (with the camera crew). Much is made of Daisy May applying her fake tan, which heralds a thread throughout the series about big sis being separated from her creature comforts.

Episode 2 opens with the duo at a crossroads on Cannock Chase, the Mecca of Midland weirdness, as they spend 10 seconds explaining what they are doing there and 20 seconds exclaiming that Charlie has stood in 'Doggy-doo-doo'. One of the enduring mysteries of this series is that two people who made their names describing growing up in the countryside seem incredibly ill-adapted to visiting it. Off they pop to a fairly familiar pub (Will & Ralf visited it; see **FT464:61**), the Four Crosses, to eavesdrop on a gathering of paranormal investigators: we know they are paranormal investigators because one of them is wearing a T-shirt with 'Paranormal Investigator' written on it. Daisy May and Charlie join the group, which looks oddly like a downbeat British sitcom about a rural self-help group. They've clearly seen it all over the years: "We've had people walk in as non-believers and leave as believers. We've also had believers walk in and leave as sceptics" (Did it turn out to be the caretaker in a rubber mask?).

> *It looks oddly like a downbeat sitcom about a rural self-help group*

And so to bed again, in the room apparently reserved for comedy duos, where the siblings reminisce about drunken teenage exploits; it becomes apparent that the whole series is far more a vehicle for the pair to discuss their relationship than any examination of locations or phenomena.

The final episode takes us to the Highlands (Charlie comments, "It's like a lunar landscape," whilst hiking through dense forest) to a Cairngorm Bothy, allegedly the most haunted in Scotland. Daisy May asks what a bothy is – apparently, it's an isolated, windswept stone shack next to a freezing stream where "a sudden and intense cold" is earnestly cited as evidence of paranormal activity.

The series purports to be both a comedy and a hunt for things ghastly and, on one level, it succeeds; but sadly only in the sense that the investigation is laughable and the comedy is ghastly. "I don't want this journey to end," says Daisy May… They are more than welcome to continue, but we won't be joining them.

both genuinely terrifying and genuinely funny, and that's John Landis's *An American Werewolf in London*. And so heavily signposted are these changes in tone that the film just doesn't flow. It's either deliberately paced, or slow, depending on your point of view, and certain sequences don't seem to bear any relation to those which came earlier. It is watchable, though, and boasts some committed performances, notably from David Yow as a world-weary (is there any other kind?) private eye. Noir fans will get their fix early on and if horror fans are prepared to stick around they'll see plenty of the old ultraviolence. Something for everyone, then.

Daniel King

★★★☆☆

The Draft

Dir Yusron Fuadi, Indonesia 2023
On digital platforms

Five friends decide to spend some time at an old, isolated villa and violent horror ensues. Wait! Don't stop reading! Despite that banal story, *The Draft!* is worth watching, because as well as being a horror film it has things to say about the horror genre and the Indonesian film industry. Moreover, it uses a clever device, borrowed from Muriel Spark and Philip K Dick, among others, in that after the exasperatingly unoriginal opening half hour the characters start to realise that they are just that: figures who exist only in the imagination of the writer and, more specifically, what he types out in the script.

Director Fuadi and his co-writers may or may not have struggled in the movie business, but they certainly lay bare the disappointments and rejections that are an occupational hazard. There are moments where the film jumps out of the 'cabin the woods' story and we follow the tribulations of the scriptwriter as he is forced to make changes to the plot and the characters at the whim of his producer. These amendments directly affect the characters, so some of them are killed off, only to be resurrected due to story revisions.

Needless to say, it's all very meta. The obvious progenitors are Wes Craven's *Scream* and Ruben Fleischer's *Zombieland*. The latter is aped shamelessly: at one point a written list of dos and don'ts for appearing in a horror pops up on screen while there is a discussion about classic versus modern zombie abilities. The characters try to save themselves from the screenwriter by coming with up ideas to influence him, rather than vice versa. That cuts both ways, though, because when the zombies rise from their graves one character says, "It's alright, they're slow. Zombies didn't get fast until the 2000s", prompting the writer to update his script: the zombies promptly become the rage-filled sprinters of *28 Days Later*.

Given this undercutting of the genre, it's hard to generate any fear, and *The Draft!* is not remotely frightening; but it's fun if you're into metafictions. And zombies.

Daniel King

★★★☆☆

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LETTERS

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Elder Charles Beck

It was good to see the review of the biography of Gray Barker, *The Saucerian,* [**FT462:60**]. I bought a copy as a result.

I've long had an interest in UFOs, but even longer in African-American music. Sometime in the late 1970s or very early 1980s, a magazine called *Sailor's Delight* – part of its remit was to sell vintage blues and gospel records uncovered by its editor Paul 'Sailor' Vernon – listed a record called "Rock And Roll Sermon" by Elder Charles Beck, noting that it was a sermon against the evils of rock and roll dating from the mid-1950s, but contained "the most blistering electric guitar", and asking "is this a spoof?"

I didn't get the record, but was intrigued enough to occasionally buy other (cheaper) 78s by the Elder, and discovered he was a Holiness Preacher (i.e. he was a member of the 'Church Of God In Christ' aka COGIC) and a multi-instrumentalist who recorded from the start of the 1930s to the late 1950s.

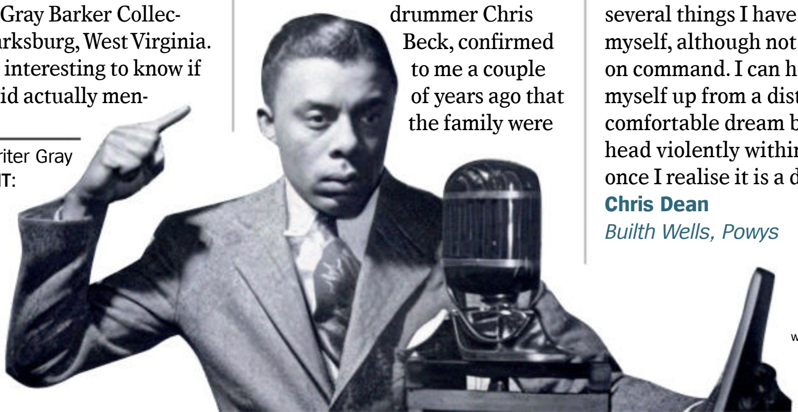
He seemed a rather elusive figure (despite having a release in the UK in the 1960s) but around 10 years ago, something reminded me of him and, now equipped with the wonders of the Internet, I dug around for information. One of the leads took me to *Jet* magazine in the early 1950s. This was a celebrity-based magazine for the African-American community and the first mention of him that I turned up (there were several) referred to him as "the flying saucer preacher". I was even more intrigued. Further digging provided some information on a poorly-received tour he undertook with contactee Orfeo Angelucci and the possibility of his writing a book about the Flatwoods Monster, following his research in that area – which Gray Barker also did. It did make me wonder about the racial make-up of the area, as we are talking pre-Civil Rights-era here.

In fact, Elder Beck was quite a star in the 1950s; he had a nationally syndicated weekly service from his church, and the Folkways label issued an LP recorded there in late 1957, called *Urban Holiness Service.* Another link showed me that in 1955 Elder Beck had contacted Gray Barker and taken out a subscription to *The Saucerian*, adding that he could mention the magazine on his show if Gray wished. There is a letter from him to Barker, and Barker's reply, on file in the "Gray Barker Collection" in Clarksburg, West Virginia. It would be interesting to know if the Elder did actually mention it on air. I have heard most of his records and there is nothing about "flying saucers" on any of them, and as noted in *Jet,* there was little enthusiasm for saucers among his congregation. It would also be interesting too to discover what the Reverend thought of the rather irreverent *Saucerian* magazine. He apparently died in 1972, though even this is rather mysterious; other sources say 1966.

The Elder's grand-son, jazz drummer Chris Beck, confirmed to me a couple of years ago that the family were aware of his interest in UFOs, but did not really know a great amount about it.

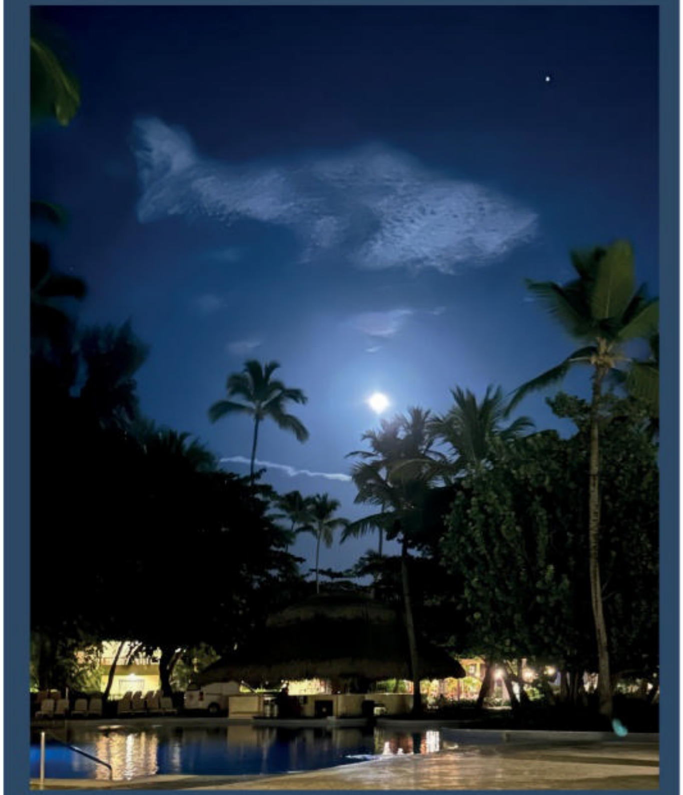
"Rock And Roll Sermon" can be found these days on *Youtube.*

Norman Darwen
Bolton, Greater Manchester



LEFT: UFO writer Gray Barker. **RIGHT**: Singing preacher Elder Beck.

SIMULACRA CORNER



This lovely sky fish was photographed by Anita Bajade while on holiday in Dominica in December 2024.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to **Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH** or to **sieveking@forteantimes.com**

Northern Lights

The report by Thomas Bunham reproduced by Matt Carroll [**FT463:67**] is easily explained. A modern witness of the Northern Lights would know it as the Aurora Borealis. A witness in the 17th century would lack that knowledge, and would be reduced to trying to describe it in everyday language, which would inevitably come out as "a wonderful fire in the air" (or sky) or similar. Given the variety of appearance of the Aurora Borealis, and the fact that it can sometimes appear surprisingly far south given the geomagnetic conditions at the time, a lot of strange reports of aerial phenomena actually come down to the Aurora Borealis.

Roger Musson
Edinburgh

Dream Experiences

In last August's issue of FT in the "It Happened to Me..." section [**FT460:65**] Andrew Clarke asks if anyone else has shared his experience of waking dreams.

I certainly have; his description "A square screen would form and random images... would appear... more real than real..." describes my experiences exactly. These images started appearing after I had been practising Image Streaming for a few months in order to improve my ability to think in pictures rather than words.

Wojciech Gaworzewski
By email

The recent article on lucid dreaming [**FT464:40-45**] mentioned several things I have experienced myself, although not generally on command. I can however wake myself up from a disturbing or uncomfortable dream by shaking my head violently within the dream, once I realise it is a dream.

Chris Dean
Builth Wells, Powys

LETTERS

Multiple sightings

I read with interest the letter in December's *Fortean Times* about a reader's UFO experience in Huddersfield [**FT464:66-67**]. I have had many sightings of strange flying objects from 1957 onwards which may be of interest. Whilst doing National Service in the army, I was posted to a camp in a remote part of Hampshire, at the Hurstbourne Regimental Pay office (the Bank of England used this camp during the war for security). The camp was situated some two miles from the village and sited in part of a wooded country estate.

In the pay corps we administered the pay records for the Royal Engineers. Being only a small camp of about 200 men, guard duties came round frequently, with 10 men per guard each night (two hours on and four off).

It was on these occasions, while watching the starry skies, that objects were often seen moving around in the heavens. One night I saw several lights moving across the sky and the drone of aeroplanes followed them as dark shapes. When the planes got close, the objects disappeared, only to re-appear when the planes had gone. Stories started to spread around the camp, with one man coming off guard saying: "I've just seen great balls of fire in the sky." I once saw a dustbin-lid-shaped object that zoomed just above the trees, causing the foliage to wave about violently.

One night my friend Ken and I went to the cinema in Andover. The last bus left at 10.30pm, but the film ended at 10.35, which meant that we missed the bus. Thumbing a lift, we eventually managed to get a ride on a delivery lorry which took us part of the way and dropped us about two miles from the camp in very lonely countryside. After walking along a lane for some time we came to a meadow fringed with trees. Across the field, we noticed a lighted object hovering. It was shaped like a light bulb on its side. Ken let out an expletive – he had not really believed in the stories going around the camp. I suggested we get into contact telepathically with the object and maybe meet the occupants. Suddenly, a plane arrived and zoomed low over the UFO, which slid away and disappeared. "Now do you believe?" I said to Ken. "Seeing is believing!"

Years later, my wife and I had a number of UFO sightings. We were living in West Looe at the time. Our bungalow was high up on the downs, with views down to the river and to Looe. We were gardening one summer evening when our attention was drawn to a ball of light which hovered low over the river. As we watched, a second one appeared; then suddenly – whoosh: an object shot out of one of them, and whizzed up the river, over the bridge and above the distant trees. We both said, "Did you see that?"

One day my wife was looking out of the window when she spotted something strange in the sky. She called me, and we watched as three tubular, metallic, blunt-ended objects came out of the clouds and went in unison across the sky at eye level until we lost sight of them, completely silent in broad daylight.

Some time later, I got up during the night to go to the bathroom. As I passed a window, I noticed lights of three different colours, or an object, sitting in a field. The lights were going round and round. My first reaction was "What on earth is a police car doing in a remote field during the night?" When I came out of the bathroom, in my pyjamas, I climbed up the grass bank to get a better look at the object, only to find there was nothing there.

I once went to a lecture on UFOs by a chap who maintained that there was a portal in Looe, and that he had witnessed objects in the skies over Looe Bay. He had even seen objects going down into the sea. All very strange!

- Further to the article about Colin Wilson [**FT464:14-15**] you may be interested to know that I met him when I was working at *Psychic News* in Great Queen Street, London. He became our editor for a short time.

PM Cawthorne
Looe, Cornwall

Henges and Black Sabbath

Regarding the article in Archaeology on the wooden Danish Henge [**FT463:12**], and the comparison to the British Stonehenge, many UK readers will probably be aware of our own Woodhenge, two miles northeast of its more durable cousin. It consists of six concentric rings of post holes and is slightly oval, as per the Danish circle. It dates from around 2,500 BC, according to the English Heritage website.

In Rebecca Batley's "Haunted Essex" article [**FT463:32-37**], it is said that some people claim that the late cunning man George Pickingill has been seen around the village, sometimes as a rabbit. I try to keep an open mind, but did it occur to them that it might be – um – a rabbit?

As a lifelong Black Sabbath fan, I found Brett Taylor's "Sabbath, Bloody Sabbath" to be an enjoyable and well-balanced article [**FT463:38-43**]. I think it is worth emphasising that despite the band's overtly devilish image, from the band name itself to some of the album titles and covers, and the doom-laden sound they pioneered, they were more anti-Satanic than anything else, at least judging by the albums I have, from 1970 to 1975. For example, the song "Black Sabbath" from their eponymous album details the fear generated by the vision of a demonic entity intent on destroying the narrator, rather than being a homage to such a being. Similarly, "War Pigs" from the album *Paranoid* is an anti-war song, and "Hand of Doom" from the same album preaches against hard drugs. They certainly weren't angels, but they were far from being Satanic.

Dave Miles
By email

SHC

I read with interest the recent letter from Roger Musson [**FT464:68**] regarding a mysterious manuscript from "the Korean Temples" which explained the phenomenon of spontaneous human combustion (SHC). While I share his apparent scepticism about "a form of Japanese hieroglyphics which is no longer known in academia", I did come across a possible account of SHC from a well-known Chinese source, the classic *Journey to the West* of Wu Cheng'en, composed in the 16th century (and perhaps familiar to many from the Japanese TV adaptation *Monkey*, broadcast in English in the 1980s, as I recall).

In the translation by Arthur Waley, at an early point in the story, Monkey seeks to learn the secret of immortality from the Patriarch Subodhi. Among other things, the Patriarch tells him that he must avoid three calamities sent by Heaven, at 500-year intervals. The second calamity is described in these terms: "After another 500 years Heaven will send down a fire that will devour you. This fire is of a peculiar kind. It is neither common fire, nor celestial fire, but springs up from within and

consumes the vitals, reducing the whole frame to ashes...”

Of course, there are many marvellous and magical things in this classic story, but if taken at face value, this could imply that the phenomenon of SHC was known in ancient China, though I haven’t yet found any other sources to support this.

Chris French (not the famous one)
Edinburgh

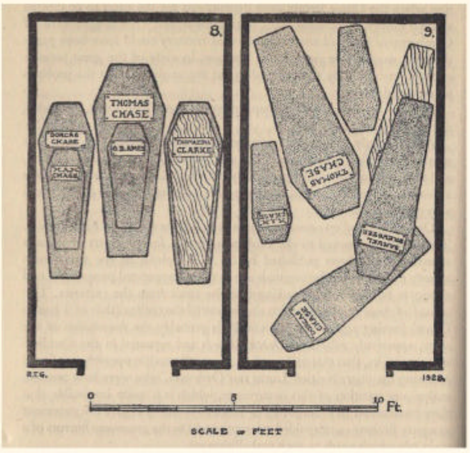
Regarding the articles by Larry Arnold on spontaneous human combustion and the letters from Roger Musson and Jerry Monk in FT464, readers may be interested in my research on the topic in the context of Chinese Buddhism: Benn, James A. “Spontaneous Human Combustion: Some Remarks on a Phenomenon in Chinese Buddhism”, in *Heroes and Saints: The Moment of Death in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, pp.101-33, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007.

Prof James A Benn
Department of Religious Studies, McMaster University, Ontario, Canada

Regarding the recent series of features on Spontaneous Human Combustion by Larry E Arnold: whereas the episode in *Bleak House* is often cited as an example case, there is a seemingly similar, albeit passing, reference in *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol (Penguin edition, 1984, p.60). A conversation between the anti-hero Chichikov and the old lady landowner Korobochka about deceased peasants (the ‘dead souls’ Chichikov is attempting to buy; you’ll have to read the book – well worth it!): “Did you have a fire, ma’m?”

“The good Lord preserved us from such a calamity, sir. A fire would have been worse. No, no, sir, he caught fire himself. Something inside him caught fire. Must have had too much to drink. Only a blue flame came out of him and he smouldered, smouldered and turned as black as coal. And he was such a clever blacksmith too.”

Tim Williams
Inverness



ABOVE: The Chase vault, Barbados, and its famous moving coffins.

More moving coffins

The story of the restless coffins in a Barbadian burial vault has been featured from time to time in *Fortean Times* (**FT133:40-44, 347:26, 385:44-49**), and, as with many historical cases, it only gets more convoluted the more data you uncover.

There is already a growing corpus of similar and possibly related events, and I would like to add three more.

The first two are taken from Peter Underwood’s *Gazetteer of Scottish Ghosts* (Fontana, 1974), a well-known book but I haven’t seen these cases mentioned before in this context. Underwood himself gives no sources, but one or two ghost specialists out there should know.

The first instance (p.50) was supposed to have happened at Braemar, Aberdeenshire. Here, John Farquarson was buried in the family vault at St Andrew’s churchyard, although he had in fact wanted his final resting place to be Inverey Castle. “The very day after the funeral passers-by were shocked to see the... coffin above ground outside the vault. Three times the coffin was found above ground and three times it was buried.” The disturbances only ended, in good spooky tradition, when Farquarson was laid to rest at the place he had wished for.

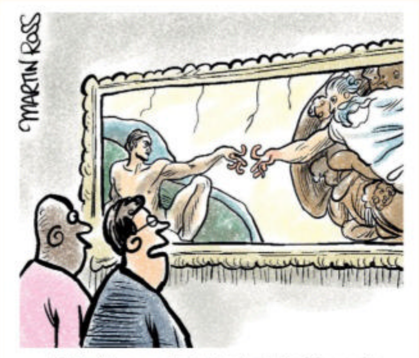
The second is on p.122 and comes from Haddington, East Lothian. Underwood relates how John Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale, was buried in the hereditary burial chapel at an unspecified date (Underwood seldom gives dates; Wikipedia gives 24 August 1682). A leaden urn, containing the brain and intestines of the Duke, was placed at the side of the coffin. “This coffin was found in different positions whenever the vault was visited.” Among the explanations suggested was that flood water had moved the coffin.

Whether these two cases have any bearing on the Barbados stories is anybody’s guess, but I thought it good they were on file.

The last case is a fictional one, from Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Premature Burial” (1844). It is reported as a true instance, but this might well be just a trick of Poe’s. His explanation is, naturally, what the title of his story implies. He writes: “The lady was deposited in her family vault, which, for three subsequent years, was undisturbed. At the expiration of this term it was opened for the reception of a sarcophagus; – but, alas! how fearful a shock awaited the husband, who, personally, threw open the door! As its portals swung outwardly back, some white-apparelled object fell rattling within his arms. It was the skeleton of his wife in her yet unmoulded shroud.

“A careful investigation rendered it evident that she had revived within two days after her entombment; that her struggles within the coffin had caused it to fall from a ledge, or shelf to the floor, where it was so broken as to permit her escape. A lamp which had been accidentally left, full of oil, within the tomb, was found empty; it might have been exhausted, however, by evaporation. On the uttermost of the steps which led down into the dread chamber was a large fragment of the coffin, with which, it seemed, that she had endeavoured to arrest attention by striking the iron door. While thus occupied, she probably swooned, or possibly died, through sheer terror; and, in failing, her shroud became entangled in some iron – work which projected interiorly. Thus she remained, and thus she rotted, erect.”

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany



" It's AI-generated - look at the fingers "

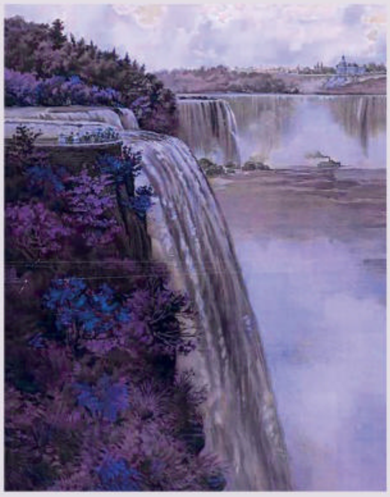
It Happened to Me...

Readers write in with their own accounts of strange phenomena

Niagara Falls anomaly

I was recently looking through some photographs of a holiday my wife and I had taken at Niagara Falls in about 2022. It must have been early because the viewing platform on which we were standing was well populated but not crowded. My wife reminded me of a strange thing she had noticed at the time: the Falls were as tempestuous as ever, and the viewpoint was quite close to the Falls, but there was no sound of falling water, though we could both hear the sound of vehicles and the chattering of the other spectators. There must be many FT readers who have visited Niagara Falls. Have any noted this phenomenon?

Viv Hobbs
Caerphilly



The Falls were as tempestuous as ever, and the viewpoint was close, but there was no sound of falling water

Strange singing

I had a strange experience when I was a teacher in Bedfordshire many years ago. I am now 96. I went to the school on a Saturday morning to mount some of the children's artwork in readiness for the village fete. The sun was streaming through the upper windows of the Victorian building and I was in a very contented mood, but I was also half aware that I couldn't hear any traffic passing on the road outside. Instead I heard children singing in the adjoining classroom. I was quite baffled at this and assumed that I was imagining it, so continued with the mounting. However, I heard the singing again. This time I searched the school building and went outside to see if there was anything going on in the village hall or elsewhere, but I found nothing at all. When I returned to the school to continue mounting the artworks, I listened out for the singing, but heard nothing. All was quiet.

Mary Hope-Gold
Ormskirk, Lancashire

The Callow Party

In the 1960s I lived in Teddington with my husband and four young children. My in-laws had a large property called Callow Hill House a few miles from Monmouth in Wales, and in the summer of 1968 we took the children there to visit their grandparents. After a brief holiday, my husband had to return to his job in London, but I stayed behind at 'Callow' with the children, where, in addition to my parents-in-law, my sister-in-law June was also staying with her two children.

One night my in-laws and a guest who was staying in the house went to the theatre in Bristol, and June and I retired to bed about 11pm. At around midnight I was woken by a car drawing up to the house, with the front door opening and what seemed like a crowd of people coming in. They made quite a lot of noise, chattering, laughing and slamming doors. Then, after approximately five minutes, there was complete silence. It was exactly as though a tape recording had been switched off. But I wasn't especially puzzled at the time, assuming it to be my in-laws returning with their friend – although I did wonder why they had made so much noise.

However, the next day, June asked me: "Who were all those people last night?" To which I replied that they were surely our parents-in-law arriving back from the theatre. "Oh no," she said. "They came in quietly at about 1am through the back of the house." Later, Frances, another sister-in-law, who lived in a cottage about 200 metres (656ft) down the drive, told me that she had heard a car drive past at around midnight, but had never heard it leave. And later still, my husband's eldest sister, Priscilla, declared: "Oh that's the Callow party – I heard it sometime in the 1950s!"

Anna O'Donoghue
Wellington, Somerset

Moving 'star'

It was around 9pm one evening in about 1973. My father had just left to work a night shift at the South Crofty tin mine between Camborne and Redruth in Cornwall. We lived on a small holding in a hamlet named Condurrow, outside the village of Beacon near Camborne.

My mother, who was a very heavy smoker, waited 15 minutes to make sure my father was not going to return before giving me some money and sending me to Beacon village to get her a packet of cigarettes. This happened often and meant I had to stand outside the local pub in Beacon and ask someone to get the cigarettes for me. This particular night I did not have to wait long at all when someone got the cigarettes for me.

Making my way back home, and being very interested in astronomy, I took to looking up at the sky. I remember there was not a cloud in sight and I was soon spotting various constellations I knew as well as the odd star. It was then I spotted what I thought was a star, but one I certainly did not recognise nor recall having seen before. I stood still to observe the star when it suddenly moved at an incredible speed across the sky, stopping for a short while before returning to its original place. It then proceeded to make unusual movements across the sky before finally disappearing in the direction of Redruth.

I ran as fast as my legs would carry me and arrived home to report what I had seen to my mother and one of my sisters. Neither believed me, my mother even asking if someone had given me something to drink at the pub. No matter how much I pleaded, they would not listen. So I went and made a cup of tea and sat down to watch the TV.

The ITN news had not long finished and the local Westward News came on. It was only on for a few minutes, but the final report made my ears prick up. Two police officers in Redruth had reported seeing a strange light in the sky making strange movements.
I turned to my mother saying, "That's what I saw!" She just sat there not saying a word, but, boy, did I feel vindicated!

Trevor Hall
Truro, Cornwall

Fairy Light

I'm 22 years old and wanted to share something that my mum, Nikki Tenni, and I encountered a few years ago while out on one of our late-night drives looking for shooting stars.

We were in the countryside, close to where we kept our horses, surrounded by nothing but fields upon fields. We were driving along one of the many quiet, dark roads, when we saw very clearly a faint orange/reddish light that appeared to be in the shape of a fairy-like figure. It was skipping across the road with this strange glow around it, and then it just went into one of the bushes. We were both shocked, and too stunned to speak for a good minute. Then we both said "Oh my God! Did you see that!?"

We spoke about it the entire way home – and in fact for the next few months. We will never forget it. Why did I leave it for four or five years later to tell anyone? It never entered our minds to write in to someone, because we didn't want to sound mad. But now we know about your magazine, who better to share this with?

Halle Tennie
By email

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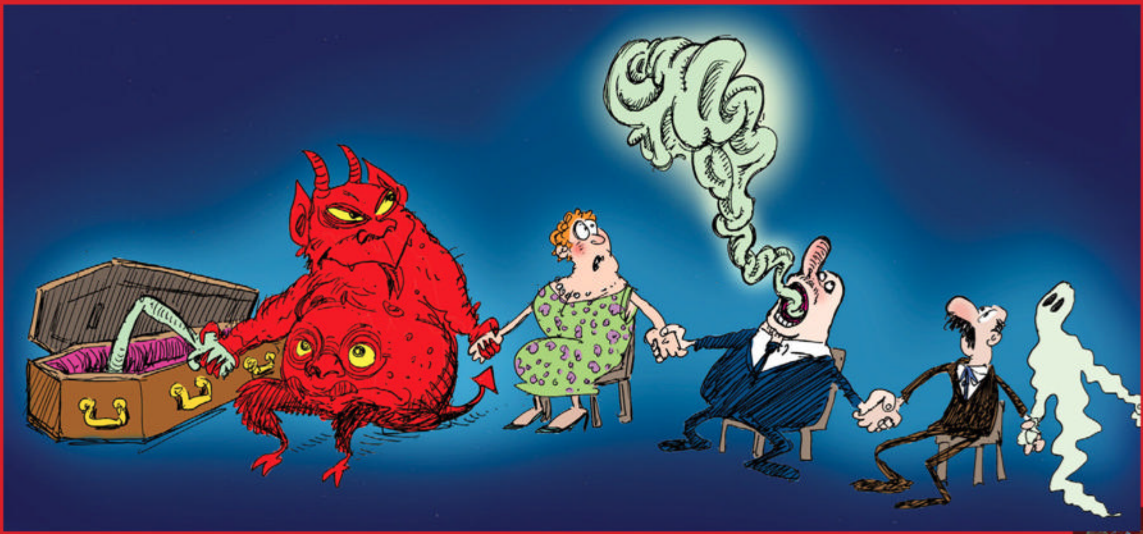

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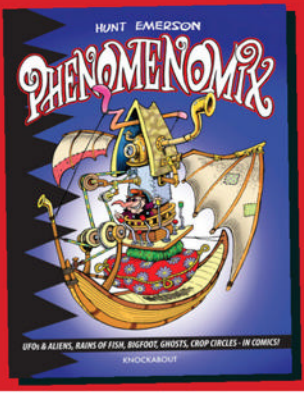
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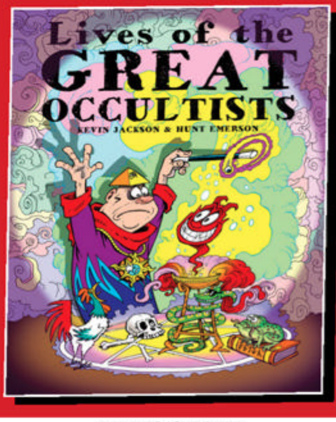
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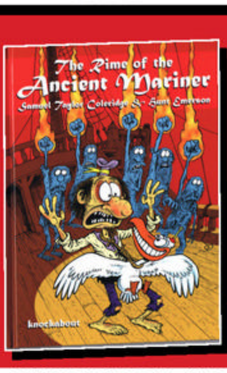
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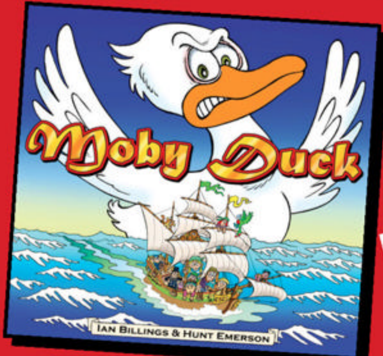
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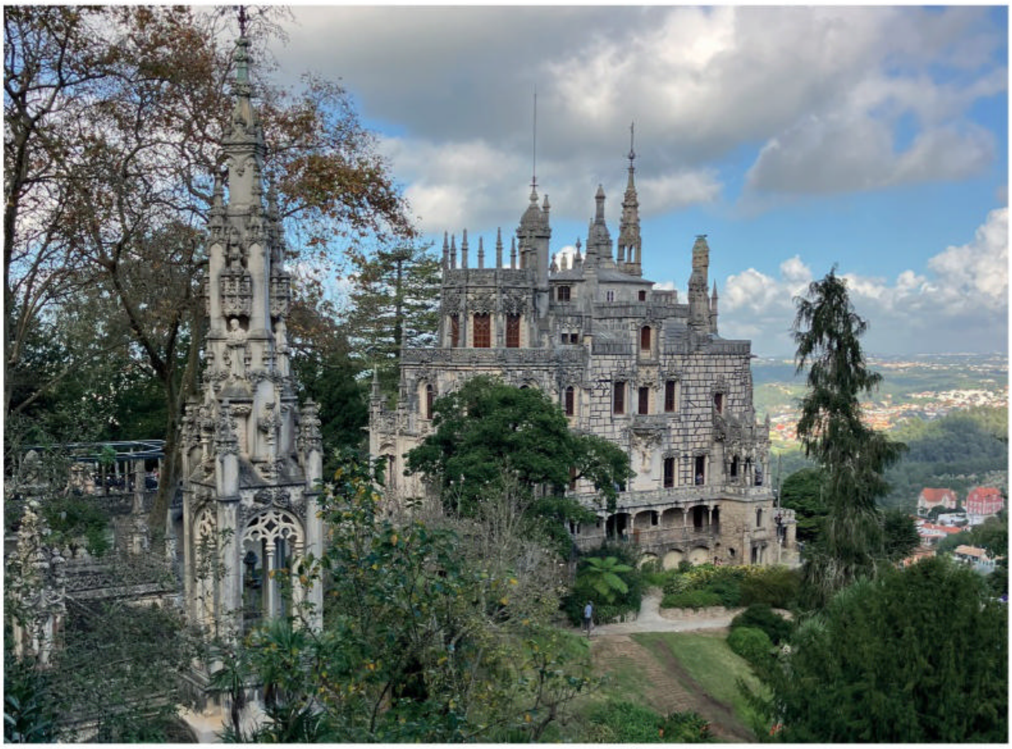
Fortean Traveller

147. Quinta da Regaleira, Sintra, Portugal

DAVID HAMBLING descends to the Underworld in search of esoteric secrets in a mysterious Gothic palace



TOP: The palace of Quinta da Regaleira. **ABOVE:** The eccentric complex was built for Brazilian-Portuguese businessman António Augusto Carvalho Monteiro, seen here in butterfly-collecting mode in an 1870 photograph.

DAVID HAMBLING

The palace of Quinta da Regaleira is one of the most remarkable esoteric sites in Europe, claimed to overshadow Rennes-le-Château and Rosslyn chapel.[1] To enter it is to step into the set for a strange and fantastic movie, like something out of Dan Brown, but with style and panache. With its underground tunnels, grottos, fountains, decorative structures, secret passages and wealth of symbolism, this is a place of mysteries.

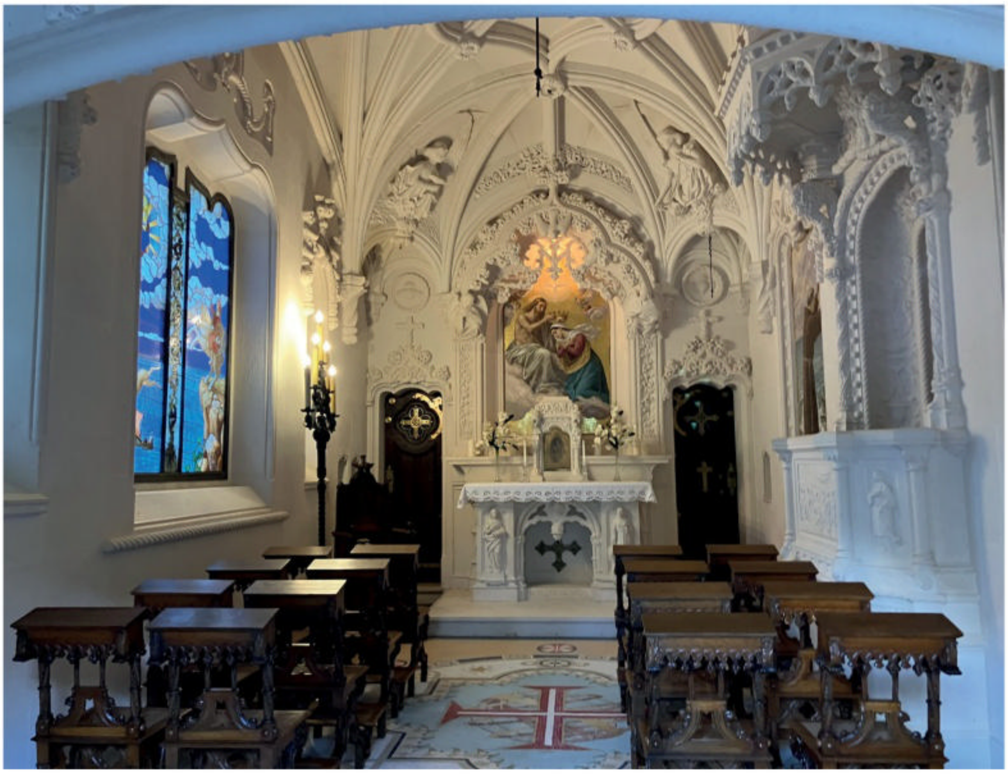
Appropriately enough, though, its real meaning and purpose are veiled, the motivations behind it unknown. There are many interpretations, which the guides will be happy to share with you. What is obvious is that the whole site, and in particular the famed Well of Initiation, is designed to fire the imagination and send it into the realm of the unknown.

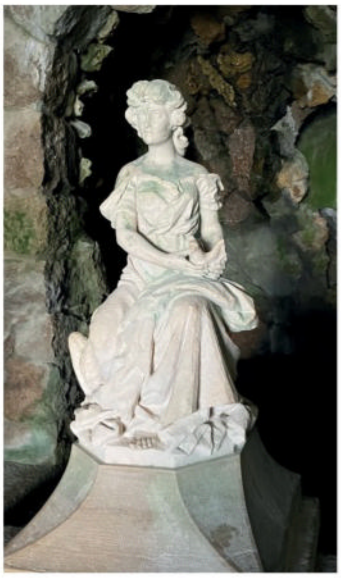
Quinta da Regaleira is located outside the picturesque mountain town of Sintra, an hour west of Lisbon. For centuries, Sintra has been a summer resort for the wealthy escaping the heat of the capital, and it has an impressive concentration of UNESCO World Heritage sites. You can take in the historic Monserrate Palace, two royal palaces – the National Palace of Sintra and the Pena Palace, a former monastery – and a Moorish castle for good measure. But aficionados of the weird head straight for the Quinta da Regaleira.

The palace was built for Brazilian-Portuguese businessman António Augusto Carvalho Monteiro (1848-1920). His fortune, made in coffee and precious stones, earned him the nickname "Monteiro dos Milhões" – Monteiro of the Millions – and he used it to amass an immense library of rare books, as well as the second-largest butterfly collection in the world. Monterio was a member of the Entomological Societies of France and London and also had a lifelong interest in botany and collecting plants.

Monteiro was clearly interested in the esoteric; his tomb in Lisbon is modelled after a Masonic temple and richly decorated with symbols. But there is no documentary evidence that he was a Freemason, Neo-Templar, or member of any other secret society. Quinta da Regaleira is so suffused with Masonic and Templar symbolism that many are convinced he was at least an initiate.

Quinta da Regaleira is laid out over four hectares, a densely wooded park lined with many shady paths winding around water features. The woods are neat and orderly in the lower parts of the estate, becoming wild and chaotic in the upper sections, clearly a deliberate progression. The garden includes trees from all over the world:





PHOTOS: DAVID HAMBLING

LEFT: The chapel, with its stained glass and elaborate stucco decoration. **ABOVE:** Leda's Cave, with its mysterious female statue. **BELOW LEFT:** A 'Radiant Delta' superimposed on a Templar Cross. **BELOW:** The gardens and grounds are filled with pools, fountains and follies.

sequoias from North America, Magnolias from Southeast Asia, Cycads from Central America and even Norfolk Island Pine from New Zealand. These reflect Monteiro's botanical interests and form a lush and exotic Edenic landscape.

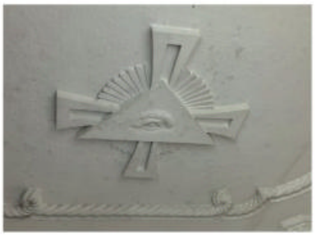
The first building you encounter is the palace with its great gothic spires, but the size is deceptive. The palace is actually quite modest, being just large enough for Monteiro and a few guests. The ground floor is taken up by a living room, dining room and billiards room; the kitchens and storage areas are in the basement. The whole building is heavily decorated, from Adam and Eve at the entrance to ceilings with ornate designs featuring letters P and crossed AAs – the initials of Perpétua (Monteiro's wife), and Monteiro himself (Antônio Augusto).

Two tunnels lead from the Palace basement, one to the gardens and one to the nearby Chapel crypt.

The Chapel is also elaborately decorated with frescoes, stained glass windows and stuccoes. One commentator describes it as "the most elegant place of worship I've seen," complete with an altar decorated with gold leaf. Again, though ornate the chapel is intimate, with just 16 seats. This is a place for the select few, not the masses.

Then there is the symbolism. The chapel is built over an old well, obviously a deliberate decision, supposedly made for geomantic reasons. Inside is a profusion of Templar symbols, in particular Templar and Order of Christ crosses on the mosaic floor, along with an armillary sphere – a symbol of Portuguese discoveries – surrounded by pentagrams. Most striking is a mystical triangle, or "Radiant Delta", with the eye of God, familiar from the US dollar bill. This is superimposed on a Templar Cross.

> ***Quinta de Regaleira is suffused with symbolism***

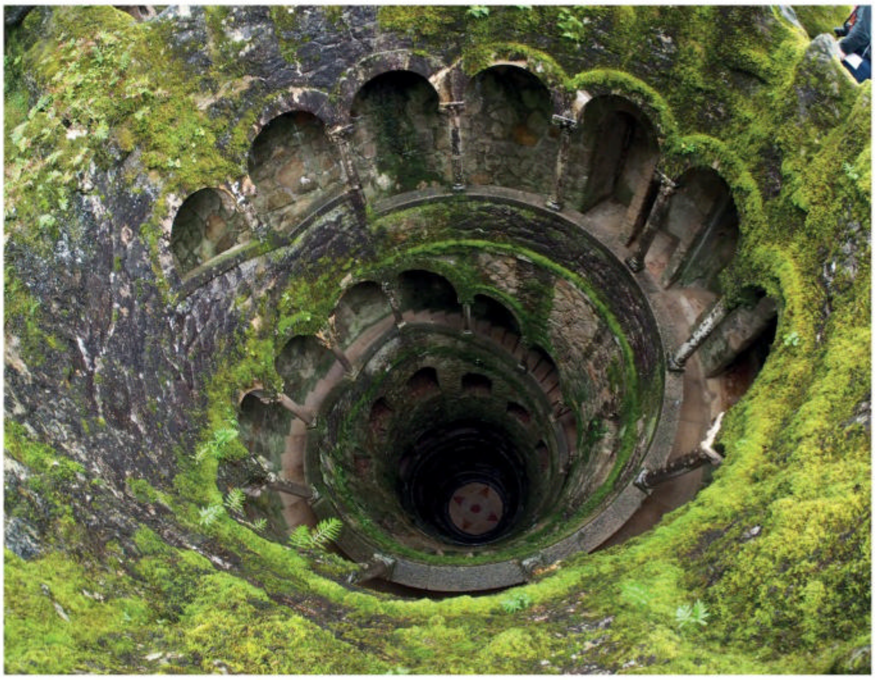


At the back of the Chapel, a relief shows two towers beside a monstrous mouth belching flames – the *Boca de Inferno*, or Mouth of Hell, believed to depict the demon Baphomet who is infamously associated with the Templars (see **FT365:28-35**). Three roses – one closed, one opening and one open – also suggest an association with the Rosicrucians.

The rest of the grounds are occupied by smaller buildings, with pools, benches, fountains and a number of follies – towers that are purely decorative or exist to provide a particular view of the grounds. Almost everything is encrusted with decorations, which may be purely æsthetic or may have symbolic meaning.

Artificial limestone caves and grottoes add enchantment and mystery. One, known as "Leda's Cave", contains the statue of a robed female figure holding

PHOTOS: DAVID HAMBLING



ABOVE LEFT: Some of Quinta's follies. **ABOVE RIGHT:**The 'Initiation Well', an underground tower with a 27-metre spiral staircase with tunnels leading off from the bottom. **BELOW:** The Well's nine niches may represent the circles of Dante's Inferno, or the nine founders of the Knights Templar.

a dove. There is no obvious iconography to connect her with the mythological Leda who was seduced by the god Zeus disguised as a swan. Who she is, and why there is a cave dedicated to her, are matters for speculation.

All this is merely a prelude to the so-called Initiation Well – another speculative name, as its actual purpose is not known. It is entered via a cave protected by two stone basilisks. The structure was never a well, but might more accurately be described as an underground tower lined with stairs: a 27-metre (88ft) spiral staircase set with 23 small niches. There are nine flights of stairs, which, it has been speculated, represent the nine levels of Dante's Inferno, or perhaps the nine founders of the Templars. At the bottom of the well the floor is inlaid with a stone compass and another Templar Cross, and there are tunnels leading to other parts of the garden. One in particular emerges underneath a decorative waterfall.

Monteiro built an actual descent to the Underworld

According to the most popular theory,[2] the well was used in a neo-Templar ritual in the initiation process for new members. Novices were blindfolded and made their way down all nine flights of stairs with a sword held at their breast. They then made their way, presumably unblindfolded, through the maze of tunnels until they found their path to the light. Some claim the tunnel walls are shaped to look like grotesque monsters, but this is a matter of interpretation.

The initiates finally emerged through a waterfall in a symbolic birth, and used stepping stones in the water to make their way to the chapel. There, the initiation would be completed and they would be admitted to the secrets of the order.

The tunnels also connect to a second, simpler structure known as The Unfinished Well, though again the name is speculative.

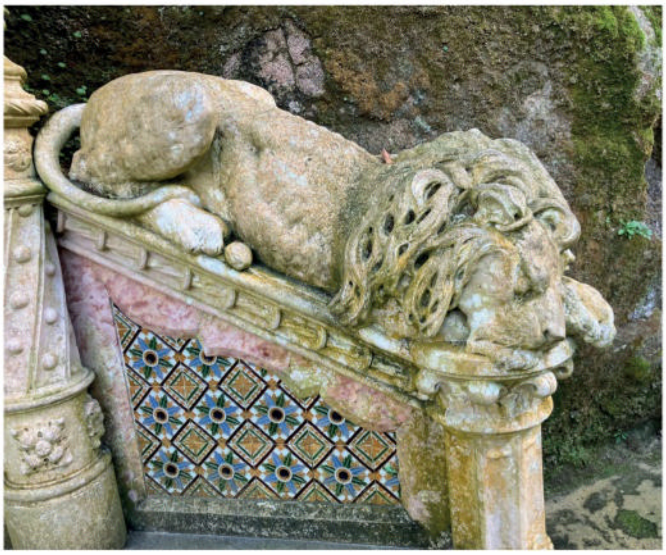
As mentioned, there is no evidence that Monteiro belonged to any secret society, nor do we have any accounts of initiation ceremonies. But the explanation makes sense in terms of the known practices of these groups and uses the same obvious symbolism. Monteiro had the means to build an actual descent to the Underworld, followed by a resurrection, rather than just relying on suggestion and symbolism.

A closer look at the construction of Quinta da Regaleira also tells us something. Though conceived by Monteiro, the design of the entire site was carried out by Luigi Manini, an Italian architect.[3] For the task, Manini adopted an emphatically Portuguese manner, following his patron's instructions to create a masterpiece in the Manueline style.

Manueline, also known as Portuguese late Gothic, dates from the 15th century and was named for King Manuel I, who saw its first flourishing.[4] Manueline architecture is distinguished by maritime

PHOTOS: DAVID HAMBLING

ABOVE LEFT: The maze of tunnels that some say were used in a neo-Templar ritual. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Iniates would move from the darkness into the light, emerging through a waterfall in a symbolic rebirth. **BELOW**: A stone lion guarding the secrets of the Quinta da Regaleira Palace.



features and elements from the great voyages of discovery – one commentator called it "aggressively nautical". The armillary sphere was a navigational instrument which also symbolised the cosmos; Manuel I adopted it as a personal emblem. Anchors, anchor chains, ropes and cables feature heavily in Manueline architecture, so we see columns made to resemble ropes. Portuguese sailors consumed artichokes rather than limes to ward off scurvy, and the artichoke was also a symbol of resurrection and rebirth, so this too was adopted as a symbol and is prominent at Quinta de Regaleira.

The Manueline style makes free use of the Cross of the Order of Christ, which decorated the sails of the Portuguese ships. This was directly descended from the Templar Cross, so the two are not necessarily distinct. As a Neo-Manueline work, the Quinta de Regaleira has something in common with London's Tower Bridge and the Houses of Parliament, built in a similar era. These are all Neo-Gothic, mediævalist creations built centuries after the buildings which inspired them to recall the grandeur of an earlier age.

Manini's style certainly owes much to his background as a designer of theatrical sets. Does the Quinta de Regaleira look like a stage set because Manini was a stage designer – or did Monteiro engage Manini because he wanted the site to function, in effect, as a stage set?

The underlying intention may have been playful, the richly layered symbolism more for dramatic effects than mystical meaning. It might be the fantasy creation of a grown-up child with the money to indulge his whims and to create the sort of landscape that others could only imagine. If Elon Musk built his dream home it might be similarly extravagant, if perhaps less tasteful. Certainly Manini's masterpiece, it would have been the perfect location for some spectacular Gothic-themed parties for Monteiro's closest friends.

But perhaps Quinta de Regaleira is more than just a bit of expensive whimsy. Even if cost meant nothing to Monteiro, the tremendous time and effort involved might indicate a more serious purpose. Perhaps the site was the centre of something akin to today's Bilderberg meetings, overlaid with the trappings of a secret society to lend them some authority and gravitas. As a popular summer resort for the rich and powerful, Sintra would be a convenient meeting place.

There may also be a link to Monteiro's lifelong fascination with entomology and especially butterflies. These are notable for undergoing metamorphosis, and there is an obvious parallel between transformation of caterpillar into butterfly and novice into initiate. For Monteiro, the mystic transformation may have made intuitive sense. But if any strange rites were performed or secret meetings held here, Monteiro's security was watertight. Unlike other groups who carried on their activities covertly in underground spaces – like Francis Dashwood's notorious Hellfire Club – no firsthand stories have ever leaked out.

Quinta de Regaleira is a complete movie set, with enough different eye-catching spaces to film an entire epic. Oddly though, no movies ever seem to have been shot here – except those that exist in the mind of the visitor. Which might be exactly as Monteiro intended…

NOTES

1 Paulo Pereira, "A Quinta da Regaleira em Sintra: uma mansão filosofal (1902-1912)" (in Portuguese): pereira-2011-a-quinta-da-regaleira-em-sintra-uma-mansao-filosofal-1902-1912.pdf

2 Fernando Teixeira & Izabela Cardosa, "The mysterious inverted tower steeped in Templar myth", BBC Travel: https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20200220-the-mysterious-inverted-tower-steeped-in-templar-myth

3 "A capela da Santíssima Trindade da Quinta da Regaleira" (in Portuguese): http://repositorio.ulusiada.pt/handle/11067/1620

4 https://picnicatthecathedral.com/2018/11/21/pimped-out-nautical-an-introduction-to-manueline-architecture-in-portugal/

DAVID HAMBLING is a South London-based technology journalist, consultant and author. He is a frequent contributor to FT and its regular science columnist.

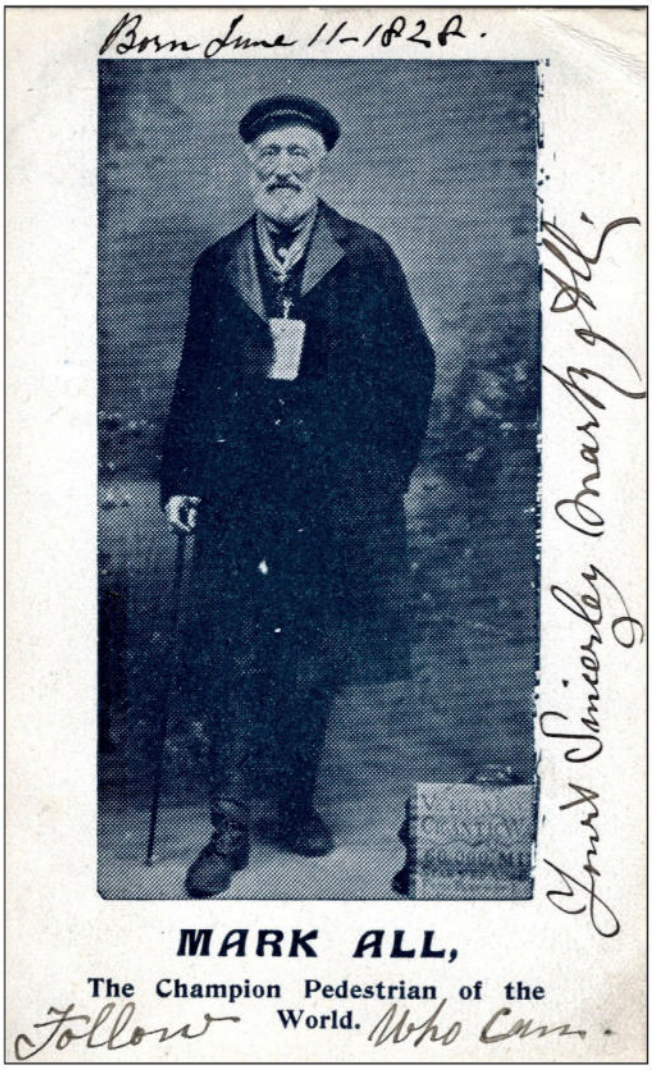
PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past follows in the (very many) footsteps of a once celebrated champion hyperpedestrian...

57. THE MYSTERY OF MARK ALL

As readers of my book *The Lion Boy and other Medical Curiosities* will be aware, there were many hyperpedestrians in Edwardian times, a few of whom made genuine attempts to walk around the world, whereas the majority had short-lived careers and gained little newspaper prominence.

In August 1905, a man who introduced himself as Mark All walked into the *Cornishman* newspaper office in Penzance. He had been born in Greenwich on 11 June 1828, he told a reporter, and worked as a marine engineer until well past retirement age. In June 1900, he had decided to walk 60,000 miles in seven years, not as a wager, but to show that elderly people were still capable of great exertions. An unspecified London sporting newspaper had promised to pay him £500 if he succeeded in his endeavour. He had since covered 44,464 miles, visiting every town and village in Britain, and walking through France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Spain and Germany. Mark All carried a black bag and a stout walking stick, and had a Union Jack wrapped round one arm and a badge with the image of a British bulldog on his chest, bearing the motto 'Follow Who Can', as a symbol of strength and endurance. He did not beg or accept alms but supported himself through honest work. In 1904, when trudging about in the neighbourhood of Newmarket, he had been hailed by two gentlemen in a motor car, one of whom was King Edward himself! "Brave old veteran," said His Majesty, giving him two sovereigns, "Be sure and communicate with me when you have accomplished your task!"



Born June 11-1828.

Yours Sincerely Mark All

MARK ALL,

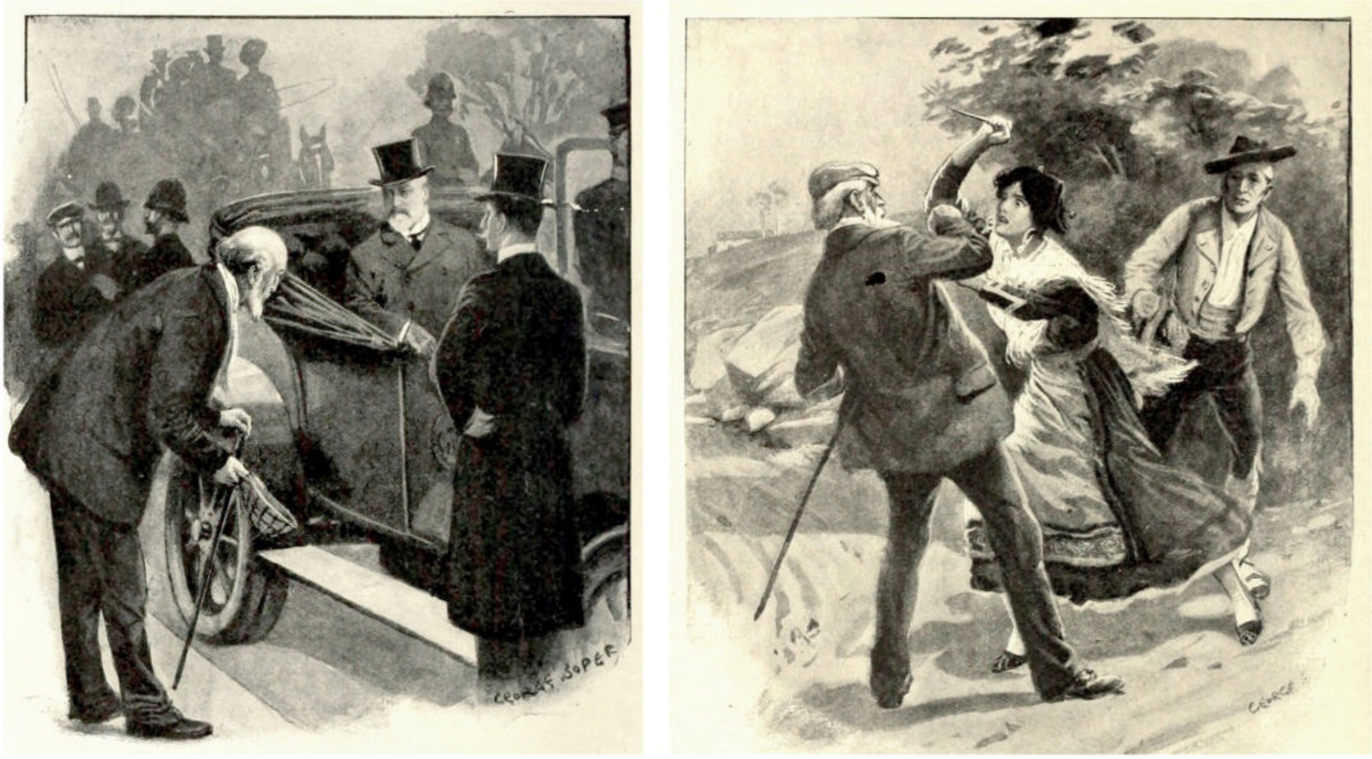
The Champion Pedestrian of the World.

Follow Who Can.

As the journalist wrote up his article – "VETERAN WALKER IN PENZANCE – 60,000 miles in seven years – King Edward's kindly action!" – Mark All walked off in the direction of Exeter, before visiting Worcester and turning up in Birmingham a week later. In late September, he gave an interview to an *Aberdeen Journal* reporter, this time claiming to have clocked up a total of 45,407 miles and to have been six times round the British Isles, and remembering that he had also walked through Holland, Belgium and Portugal. He was now the champion long-distance walker of the world, having beaten the previous record of 40,000 miles in five years, held by a German. Mark All next intended travelling to Russia and walk through Siberia, he said, and indeed there is a hiatus in the newspaper accounts of his activities until early March 1906, when he turned up in Dundee, before re-visiting Bristol, Exeter and Penzance. He told a *Western Times* journalist about his adventures abroad: he had been stoned, shot at and twice stabbed, robbed of all his clothes, lost in a snowdrift and struck down by lightning. The King had twice spoken to him and given him money, and the journalist noted that he was "not averse to accepting a gratuity, however small, should any kindly disposed admirer be inclined to give him one." In August 1906, Mark All turned up in Leeds, on his way to London via Bradford, Halifax, Rochdale and Manchester. Having told other journalists that he had successfully reached Russia, he now said that he had twice been refused a passport to get into that country. He turned up in the West Country in October 1906, telling the journalists that he had just toured Scotland, Ireland and North Wales, and that only 2,000 miles remained of his target of 60,000.

> *In 1908, he declared that he had worn out 57 pairs of boots*

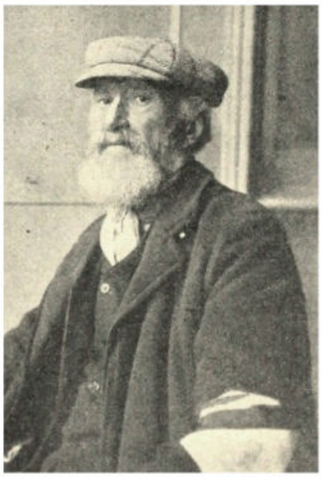
In February 1907, he was in Saffron Walden, confident of finishing his task in time, but sad that he had lost his dog in Marseilles. Just a few weeks later, he turned up in Scotland, where he told Aberdeen and Perth journalists that his task was finished and that he was to be rewarded by King Edward. But when he turned up in Leeds in August, he announced that he was now intending to walk 100,000 miles in nine years. He was on his way to Russia, he announced, but instead we find him in Gloucester and Exeter, stating that he was on his way to



FACING PAGE: A signed postcard of Mark All, the "Champion Pedestrian of the World". **ABOVE**: Two illustrations from "A Sixty-Thousand Mile Walk – The Adventures of Mark All", a two-part article from *The Wide World Magazine,* January and February 1908. The first shows Mark All meeting the King and the second an encounter with brigands while walking across Spain. **BELOW**: A portrait of the hyperpedestrian man of mystery that accompanied the article.

Cornwall before taking the ferry from Southampton to Le Havre, intending to cover 20,000 miles on French roads. In June 1908, when he was back in Exeter, he told a journalist that he had been taken prisoner in Russia, being liberated through the intervention of the British Ambassador in St Petersburg. In December, again back in Exeter, he declared that he had now walked 89,293 miles and worn out 57 pairs of boots during his endless journey. In July 1909 he was in Chelmsford, telling a journalist that he had walked 98,465 miles out of 100,000 to win a wager of £2,000. The following month, when passing through Selkirk in Scotland, he told a *Southern Reporter* journalist that his 100,000 mile walk had been completed, but that he carried on walking, just for the fun of it.

Throughout the pre-war years, Mark All continued walking: the unlikely tale of this octogenarian Ahasverus turned up in the provincial newspapers with regularity, as he visited their editorial offices. In July 1910, he was knocked down by a motor bicycle near Chelmsford, but escaped without serious injury. In February 1911, he was in Dundee, telling a journalist that he had just been to Aberdeen and that he was walking towards Perth. Not even the Great War could stop the champion pedestrian: in 1914, he visited Exeter, Gloucester and Bath, and in 1915, when he was walking through Essex, he told a journalist a yarn about being lynched by a mob in Germany after defeating the local champion in a walking match. He had met Kaiser Bill, he claimed, and the haughty Emperor had been insulted by his demeanour and shouted that he was a damned fool like the rest of his countrymen. Throughout the war years, he made regular appearances in the West Country and Essex newspapers. In March 1920, he turned up in Gloucester, claiming to have walked nearly 300,000 miles. "93 and Still Walking!" exclaimed the headline of the *Bath Chronicle* the same year: Mark All had visited all five continents and covered more than 300,000 miles. The final notice of him alive is from July 1922, when he visited the office of the *Essex Chronicle* to inform them that he had now covered 350,000 miles, at the age of 94, after walking for nearly 22 years. In April 1925, his death at the Southampton poor-law infirmary was noticed in several newspapers: an entry in his diary, said to have been written on his 95th birthday, read "Since August 6th, 1900, I have walked 356,000 miles. Finished in Exeter. Now got to walk to London to get my reward."



Mark All ended his 20-year innings as a provincial newspaper celebrity 'not out': no person ever hinted that he was an impostor, and his dramatic yarns about his adventures abroad were enthusiastically regurgitated by the journalists. The *Daily Mail*, a London newspaper with an interest in hyperpedestrian exploits, reproduced two provincial newspaper articles about Mark All in 1905 and 1906, but never interviewed him; the mainstream *Times* and *Illustrated London News* did not mention him at all. There is no genealogical record suggesting that his alleged date of birth of 11 June 1828 is correct, nor did any Mark All die any time in 1925. The reason for this is likely to be that 'Mark All' was a false name and that the hyperpedestrian who emerged in 1905 was a much younger man, who pretended to be elderly in order to make himself seem more interesting. There is no doubt that 'All' walked some considerable distances in Essex and the West Country, or that he visited Aberdeen, Dundee and Perth in Scotland, as well as Leeds, Derby, Manchester, Sheffield and Chester, but the yarns about his overseas exploits are likely to be inventions. There is nothing to suggest that he ever left Britain: although the American newspapers quoted some of the provincial newspaper accounts of him, they never mentioned a word about his purported Transatlantic career. It is a mystery what can have driven this extraordinary pseudo-hyperpedestrian in his elaborate scheme to pose as a walking champion and gain provincial newspaper renown. Today, this marvellous character is almost totally forgotten, except for a few yellowed newspaper cuttings and the scarce signed postcard reproduced here.

For more marathon hikes, see Jan Bondeson, "Walking Around the World: From the Annals of Human Hyperpedestrianism", **FT376:36-41**.

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WHY FORTEAN?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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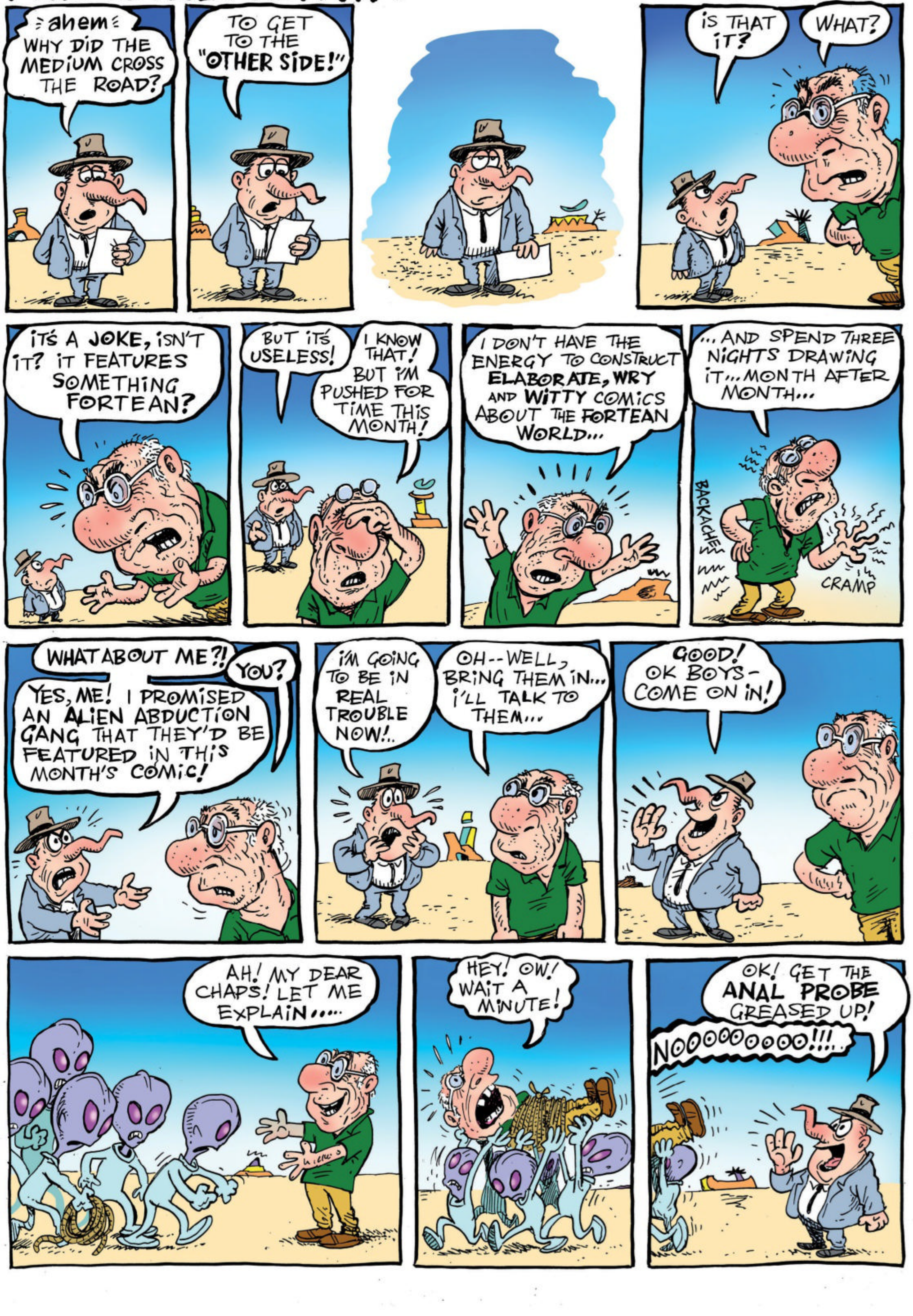
PHENOMENOMIX

A JOKE

HUNT EMERSON


ahem
WHY DID THE MEDIUM CROSS THE ROAD?
TO GET TO THE "OTHER SIDE!"
IS THAT IT?
WHAT?
IT'S A JOKE, ISN'T IT? IT FEATURES SOMETHING FORTEAN?
BUT IT'S USELESS!
I KNOW THAT! BUT I'M PUSHED FOR TIME THIS MONTH!
I DON'T HAVE THE ENERGY TO CONSTRUCT ELABORATE, WRY AND WITTY COMICS ABOUT THE FORTEAN WORLD...
...AND SPEND THREE NIGHTS DRAWING IT... MONTH AFTER MONTH...
BACKACHE
CRAMP
WHAT ABOUT ME?!
YOU?
YES, ME! I PROMISED AN ALIEN ABDUCTION GANG THAT THEY'D BE FEATURED IN THIS MONTH'S COMIC!
I'M GOING TO BE IN REAL TROUBLE NOW!..
OH--WELL, BRING THEM IN... I'LL TALK TO THEM...
GOOD! OK BOYS - COME ON IN!
AH! MY DEAR CHAPS! LET ME EXPLAIN....
HEY! OW! WAIT A MINUTE!
OK! GET THE ANAL PROBE GREASED UP!
NOOOOOOOOO!!!

COMING NEXT MONTH

FROM GURDJIEFF TO GLASTONBURY

A MINI-SEARCH FOR THE MIRACULOUS

THE DRUID'S TEMPLE

FUNNY GOINGS-ON AT A YORKSHIRE FOLLY

+ GHOSTS & THE ELDERLY,
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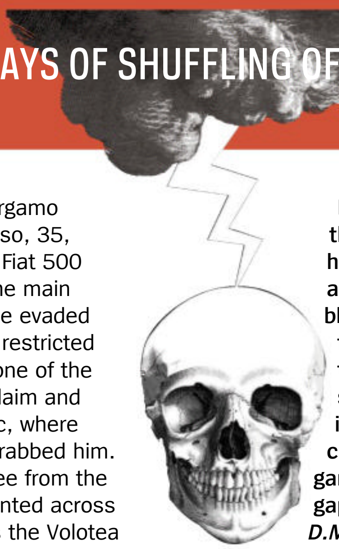
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 467
ON SALE 22 JAN 2026

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Arriving at Milan Bergamo Airport, Andrea Russo, 35, abandoned his red Fiat 500 and sprinted into the main terminal building. He evaded security, entered a restricted area, forced open one of the doors in baggage claim and ran onto the tarmac, where two border police grabbed him. Wresting himself free from the officers, Russo sprinted across the runway towards the Volotea Airbus A319 flight V73511 from Milan to Asturias that was preparing to take off, engines running. On CCTV, Russo can be seen heading for the starboard wing, pursued by airport staff, and attempting to jump into the engine. Failing to reach it, he fell back onto the runway, and, as staff closed in, got up, sprinted round the front of the plane and leapt into the blades of the port engine, which were spinning at nearly 15,000 rpm. A passenger on the plane said, "Suddenly, we heard a noise and a bang," and the CCTV images show Russo's lifeless remains being flung out of the engine and onto the tarmac as airport workers hold their heads in horror. Police could find no immediate reason for Russo's suicide, but said that he "had a history of drug problems".

Also dying by jet engine was David Monroe, aged 72, founder of the San Antonio Museum of Science and Technology. He was helping move a 2.5-ton (2268kg) engine at the Boeing Center in San Antonio, Texas, when it rolled off a loading dock and fell on top of him, killing him instantly. *dailymail.co.uk, 11 Jul; tpr.com, 20 Sept 2025*.

When Amy Parry returned home in Seasalter, Kent, and found her husband, Ed, 54, uncharacteristically absent, she tried to phone him, but got no answer, saying: "It was like he'd been abducted. It didn't add up at all." After four hours, during which he still did not return, Amy called the police, who made door-to-door enquiries and carried out extensive searches in an attempt to locate him. Ed had last been seen doing some work on his neighbour's garden, and while there was evidence that work had been carried out, there was no sign of him there. However, two days after Ed's disappearance, one of the family dogs began to act in an agitated manner, and following him, Amy was led to their garden room, where she found Ed's body, wedged between the back wall and a fence. He had a serious wound to his wrist and a hand-held chainsaw with bloodstains on the blade was found nearby. Police concluded that he had not committed suicide, but had accidently injured himself with the chainsaw while working on the garden, had fallen into the narrow gap, then bled to death there. *D.Mail, 20 Aug 2025.*

Contracted to work on a 55ft (16.7m) motorboat owned by an Italian businesswoman, Giovanni Marchionni, 21, had only recently obtained his boating licence. He had a small cabin on the boat, and it was there that he was found unresponsive one morning in August. Medics determined that he had been dead for several hours, and although there seemed to be no obvious cause of death, a woman who had been in Marchionni's cabin the night before reported that she had left because of "a bad smell". This led to suspicions that he might have been killed by toxic fumes, which further investigation traced to the boat's chemical toilet. *Sun, 12 Aug 2025.*

The main passion of Texan millionaire Asher Watkins, 52, was big game hunting, and his social media was full of photos of him posing triumphantly with animals he had slaughtered, such as mountain lions and deer. However, roles were reversed when he visited South Africa and attempted to stalk a 1.4 ton (1,400kg) buffalo, assisted by an animal tracker and professional marksmen. Without warning, the bull hurtled out of the bush at 35mph (56km/h) and slammed into Watkins, with the impact killing him instantly. Coenraad Vermaak Safaris, who charge £7,500 for opportunities to kill the local wildlife and had organised Watkins's hunt, described the animal's attack as "unprovoked". *Sun, 7 Aug 2025.*

A report in the *Irish Independent* of 24 October 1924 related the following tale: "A man died in one of the London hospitals yesterday from actinomycosis, an infection by fungus. It is believed, from the habit of nibbling blades of grass... he was a great walker, and was accustomed to nibble blades of grass as he went along." *Ireland's Own, 11 Oct 2024*.

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